

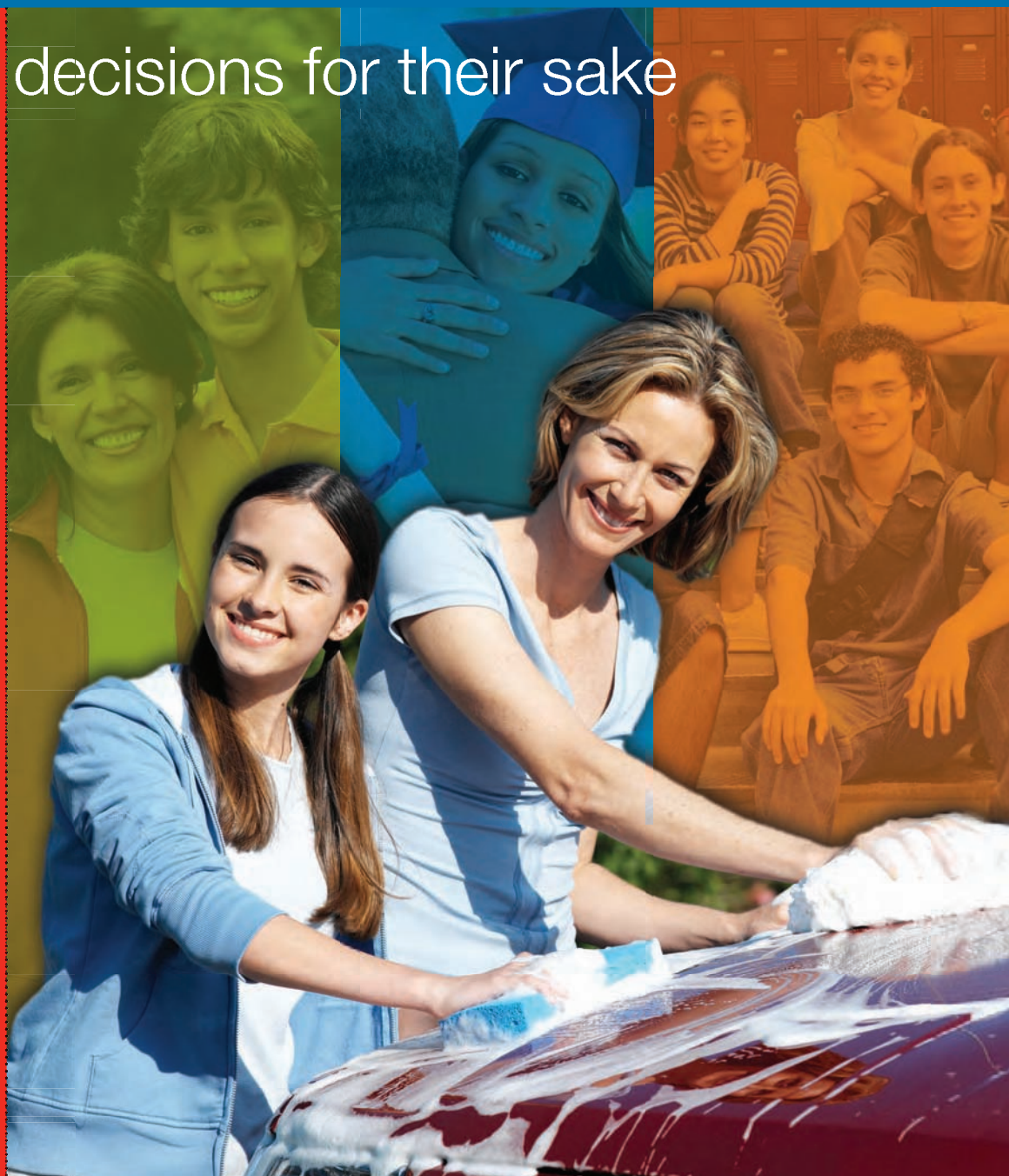
# **TEEN DRIVER**

*A Family Guide to  
Teen Driver Safety*

The right decisions for their sake



[teendriver.nsc.org](http://teendriver.nsc.org)







Dear Parent,

Welcome to one of the most exciting and frightening times of your teenager's life. For many parents, this is a time of mixed emotions. It is likely you have seen news stories identifying crashes as the leading cause of teen deaths in the United States. The good news is there are science-based practices you can implement immediately to help keep your teen safe. *A Family Guide to Teen Driver Safety*, based on more than a decade of research, identifies how to reduce the risks associated with teen driving. Please take time to read this guide and talk about it with your teen.

It didn't occur to me to check my state's laws concerning teens when my daughter learned to drive. But then I learned something important from the National Safety Council. Under Graduated Driver Licensing, her license is invalid after 10 p.m. on weekdays and 11 p.m. on weekends. Statistics show that teen fatalities increase after these times. We both agreed on a curfew once we knew that.

I know that *A Family Guide to Teen Driver Safety* will increase your knowledge. It includes recommendations to help young drivers minimize risk, avoid traffic violations and even save your teen's life. Use it to develop your own set of driving rules based on the science behind Graduated Driver Licensing. You'll learn specific actions to build your teen's experience and confidence behind the wheel. This guide also can help you and your teen discuss – and agree on – driving expectations.

We appreciate your interest in *A Family Guide to Teen Driver Safety*, and we welcome your feedback. Please direct your comments to: Teen Driver Safety Programs at [teendriversafetydesk@nsc.org](mailto:teendriversafetydesk@nsc.org).

Sincerely,



Janet Froetscher  
President & CEO  
National Safety Council





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# OUR PURPOSE

NATURALLY, THE FIRST ADVISORS WE WENT TO WERE THE SCIENTISTS and highway safety research experts who presented their research findings at our Symposiums. We then expanded our advisor group to include experts in each of the areas addressed in the Guide. We consulted with law enforcement officers, Driver Education instructors, people who design and build cars, public safety officials, and professionals in the insurance industry. Each added his or her insights to particular passages in the Guide — some are quoted directly, while others helped shape the overall message to families.





# THIS GUIDE IS THE LOGICAL NEXT STEP

for the research findings from the National Safety Council's GDL

Symposiums. The Guide takes 15 years of scientific data and translates it into practical information for parents and teens to use in reducing teen crash risk.

Whether you're a parent who is anxiously anticipating your teen's novice driving experience, a family looking for guidance during the minimum two-year process a new driver goes through, or a teen unfamiliar with the surprisingly high risks that teenagers face behind the wheel, this Family Guide is intended to be helpful to everyone involved. Our purpose is to take any anxiety and uncertainties you may feel and replace them with specific actions you can take to manage the risks of teen driving in your family.

In addition, we have three specific goals for this Guide:

- Inform family members about the risks of teen driving based on solid, scientific evidence,
- Provide practical advice about ways to reduce that risk, also based on solid, scientific evidence, and
- Encourage parent-teen cooperation and involvement throughout the entire process from learning to drive through independent driving.

Our overall objective is to provide our readers with helpful information and advice about teen driving based on the most updated evidence available to us. We want to share with families the proven methods that help diminish the serious dangers teens face in the first months and 1,000 miles after they begin to drive.

## KNOW YOUR RISKS

How risky is novice teen driving? Is there anything that can be done to reduce risks? Families know driving involves risk, but they often don't know how much or how best to react to it. Some parents may think, "We all made it through okay," but many others rightly wonder, "Are there new ways to reduce the risks teenage drivers face behind the wheel?"

The first goal of this Guide is to provide a realistic picture of the risks of teen driving. Family members should be anxious about teen driving, because driving comes with substantially higher risks for novice teenage drivers than it does for adult drivers. In fact, driving may represent the highest exposure to risk that most teenagers will face in their

lifetime. However, there are ways to reduce the risk. We can turn our concerns into concrete steps to protect the teen driver, and that's what this Guide is intended to help you do.

## THIS GUIDE IS GROUNDED IN SCIENCE

Scientific evidence is the foundation for all the recommendations, charts and advice in this Guide. The information provided is based on the latest research and evidence used by the highway safety community. It comes from tried-and-true practices for teaching teens to drive and the newest approaches to structuring teen driving privileges currently being incorporated into traffic laws around the world.

The scientific facts do two important things for us. First, they dispel the myth that only "troubled" or "daredevil" teens are in danger of crashing. In fact, all teens are in danger, simply because of their youth and lack of driving experience. Second, the scientific facts show us which methods actually help reduce driving risks for all novice teen drivers.

## PRACTICAL ADVICE FROM EXPERTS

The second goal of this Guide is to provide practical, how-to advice on ways families can reduce teen driving risks. Parents have to be actively involved in the teen driving process. Equipped with the scientific evidence and specific suggestions from our advisors, parents can make a real impact on the odds that their teen drivers will come home safely.

The design, content, and writing of the Guide were based on consultation with a



wide range of experts, including scientists, researchers, highway traffic safety professionals, doctors, public health workers, driver education instructors, automotive manufacturing safety experts, law enforcement officers, and insurance officials.

All of these individuals have dedicated their careers to promoting teen driver safety and most of them are or were parents of teen drivers themselves. The cumulative expertise of these men and women represents thousands of hours of time and attention

devoted to understanding the risks facing teen drivers and ways to improve their safety. This Guide is rich with their personal experiences and professional knowledge.

At the end of most sections, you'll find "Advice" boxes filled with practical suggestions for ways to reduce teen driving risks. Many of the points in the "Advice" boxes have been chosen based on their effective use in states implementing new approaches to structuring teen driving privileges.

### WORK TOGETHER AS A FAMILY

Our third goal is to promote parent-teen involvement and cooperation in teen driving. We strongly encourage your family to map out the timing of the teen driving process that meets your family's unique needs. We refer to this process as your Family's Plan. This plan has several important parts, including setting rules and limits for learning to drive and for driving independently. We discuss all the parts of your Family's Plan at length in upcoming sections.

To better navigate the road to teen driving, both parent and teen need to have a broad overview of the entire driving process right from the start. This includes knowing your state's requirements for teen driving and determining the timing of the process for your family. In addition, you'll need to work as a family. You will need to talk to each other, set expectations, and anticipate steps along the way.

We've designed the sections in the Guide so you can tailor a "road map" for teen driving in your family. In each section, we explain information you need to know about teen driving using scientific data. Then we offer specific "how-to" advice for ways to manage your teen's driving experience.

The Guide follows the timeline of the journey your teen will take from learning to drive to becoming an independent driver. It

### A NOTE ABOUT "THE SCIENCE SAYS":

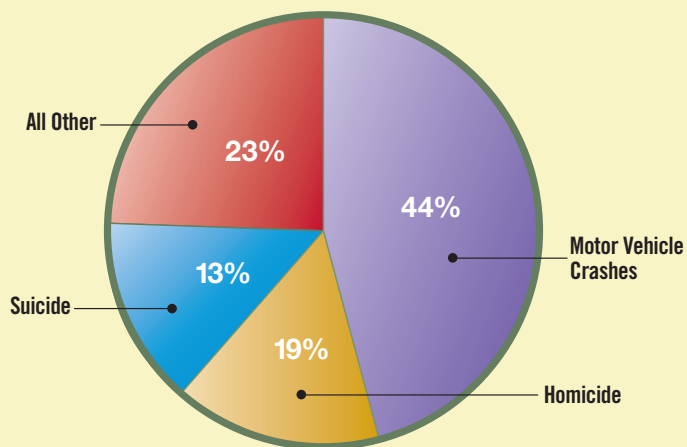
Throughout the Family Guide, you'll find boxes labeled, "The Science Says." These facts come from studies and research evidence and are included to highlight important points in both the discussions and the advice contained in the Guide.

Many of these "science boxes" measure risk in terms of fatalities. That is because the data about highway traffic fatalities is the most complete and the most accurate information available for scientific analysis. But keep in mind that for every traffic fatality, there are scores of additional crashes that result in injuries, property damage, increased insurance costs, etc. The risks of teen driver crashes and their consequences consist of much more than fatalities.



### THE SCIENCE SAYS

#### Traffic Crashes are the Leading Cause of Fatalities for Teens



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC),  
National Center for Health Statistics – 2006 data



includes everything from getting ready to apply for a learner's permit, going through the licensing process, and on to driving independence.

We want you to be able to use this Guide as a comprehensive resource throughout your teen's driving experience, whether you read from beginning to end or simply pick and choose the sections that are relevant to your family at any point during the process. The next section, "Quick Start," summarizes key concepts in the guide. "Quick Start" will give you an idea of the new evidence about the risks of teen driving, and the new techniques being developed to reduce those risks. It's a good place to begin your teen's journey to driving independence. ▼

## A NOTE ON THE TEXT

We wanted to be inclusive in addressing our readers, but had to develop some shorthand to make it more readable.

We're talking to families — teens and parents alike. When we say "your teen" we mean "the teen in your family." Sometimes there is a message with special meaning for a parent or teen, but most often we are talking to both.

We alternate using "she" and "he" to describe the teen, section by section, rather than using "he or she" or "s/he" throughout.

When we say "parent" we mean both parents or guardian, or the responsible adult.

Terms vary from state to state. We've tried to use the most generic words as a common shorthand. For instance, we call the temporary learner's driving license a "learner's permit"; the state bureau that issues licenses the "Department of Motor Vehicles" (DMV) or the "Motor Vehicle Administration" (MVA); and the charge for drinking and driving "Driving While Intoxicated" (DWI). Your state may use different words, but we're all talking about the same thing.

## A NOTE ABOUT "ADVICE":

Most sections of the Family Guide conclude with a box that contains specific advice about how the information contained in that section can be put into practice by your family.

Families, communities and state laws are different and make it difficult to establish "rules" that are appropriate or useful for all families or all teens. Yet both research evidence and extensive experience do provide the information and practices that each family can use to best manage their teen driver's experience. The advice in the Family Guide is intended to do that for your teen.

Here is some advice about an important subject that you should think about even before your teen starts his journey:

### ADVICE

Even before your teen begins the process of getting his learner's permit, parents should think about what vehicle their teen will use during his novice driving experience.

A good deal of the risk teen drivers face depends upon what kind of vehicle they are in — including size and safety features. This is one area that parents have near total control of, yet think little about.

### VEHICLE SELECTION

For guidance from the National Safety Council on how to select a safer vehicle for your teen driver, see the NSC Web site at [www.nsc.org](http://www.nsc.org) (search for "vehicle selection and maintenance"), and also the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety Web site at [www.iihs.org](http://www.iihs.org).



# QUICKSTART

## THESE TWELVE POINTS PARENTS SHOULD KNOW

will help you get started.

They summarize key recommendations in the Family Guide to Teen Driver Safety. Research shows teens have a higher crash risk for many reasons.

We know a lot about the patterns of teen crashes — the when, where, and why. They are not random events.

The good news is that there are proven ways to reduce that risk.

This is the information that families need to know.

Throughout this Guide, we explain how you can adopt the solutions listed here.



1

### THE SPECIAL RISKS OF INEXPERIENCED TEEN DRIVING

All teens' risk of being in a car crash is at a lifetime high in the first 12 months and 1,000 miles of driving. This is due to their lack of driving experience. Throughout this guide, you'll learn more about the risks of inexperience.

2

### TEEN DRIVER RISKS WITH SEAT BELTS, ALCOHOL AND SPEEDING

Assuming that your teen is always following the seat belt, alcohol and speeding laws can be tragic assumptions. Teens are far less likely to wear their seat belts than adults. Nearly one-third of drivers ages 15-20 killed in crashes had been drinking. Teens tend to seek thrills, and speeding delivers. See page 37 to help your teen make safe driving choices.

3

### TEEN DRIVER RISKS WITH CELL PHONES AND TEXT MESSAGING

Not all distractions are created equal. Cell phones combine all four types of distractions — manual, auditory, visual and cognitive — into one dangerous and often deadly result. The likelihood of a motor vehicle crash increases fourfold when talking or texting on a cell phone while driving, whether it is a handheld or hands-free device. Nearly 40% of young adults send and receive text messages while driving. What can you do? See page 43 for information.





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### HOW GDL REDUCES THESE RISKS

The gradual introduction of greater driving challenges and exposure to risks over time is key to Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL). No single regulation, procedure, driver education program or state law can, by itself, make your teen a safer driver. Only a combination of practice, gradual exposure to higher-risk situations and parental involvement can reduce a teen's chance of being involved in a crash. GDL is explained starting on page 9.

5

### THE LIFE-SAVING BENEFITS OF GDL PASSENGER RESTRICTIONS

When driving with multiple passengers, teen drivers face a crash risk 3-5 times greater than when driving alone. Many GDL laws limit the number of teen passengers during the new driver's first six to 12 months behind the wheel. Learn why on pages 27-31.

6

### THE LIFE-SAVING BENEFITS OF GDL NIGHTTIME RESTRICTIONS

While teens drive only 15% of their total miles at night, 40% of their fatal crashes happen then. Most nighttime teen crashes occur before midnight. The hours of 9 p.m. to midnight should be the primary focus of nighttime restrictions. Reducing nighttime driving risks is explained on pages 32-35.



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### YOUR STATE'S GDL AND TEEN DRIVER LICENSING LAWS

Nearly all states have adopted some form of GDL. Laws vary widely from state to state. See pages 55-56 in this Guide, and visit [teendrivers.ncsc.org](http://teendrivers.ncsc.org) for links to your state's driver licensing agency.

8

### HOW YOUR FAMILY RULES CAN IMPROVE ON YOUR STATE'S LAW

Currently no state has the optimum GDL system. So your state's driver licensing regulations may not deliver the greatest safety benefits. Compare your state law with the research evidence in this Guide and decide if you need to add restrictions to your teen's driving guidelines. No matter what age your state allows, you should decide the right age for your teen to begin driving. Pages 55-56 share a summary of our recommendations.

9

### THE ROLE OF DRIVER EDUCATION

Driver Education can teach a teen to operate a vehicle and also explain the rules of the road, but science tells us that traditional Driver Education doesn't reduce a teen's exposure to crash risk. Learn why on pages 16-18.



10

### THE IMPORTANCE OF SUPERVISED DRIVING DURING LEARNER'S PERMIT PHASE

Parental involvement is the cornerstone of GDL. Parents make a critical safety difference as role models and guides while teens learn to drive. The learner's permit is a license to learn, not a license to drive independently. Teens should drive up to 50 hours or more over 9-12 months with an adult supervisor. Find guidance for parents on pages 19-23.

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### HOW THE PROVISIONAL LICENSING PHASE WORKS

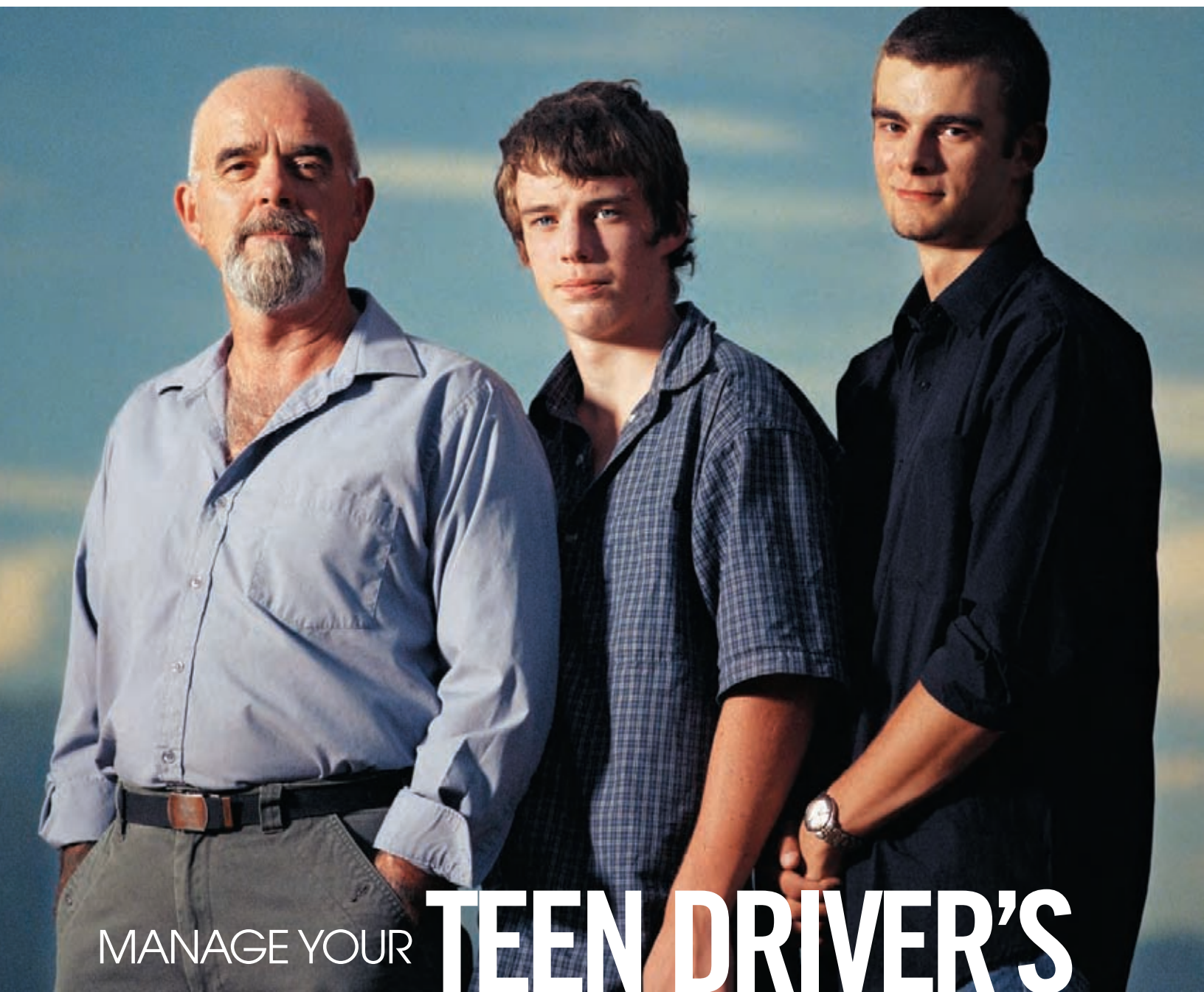
The newly licensed teen has acquired skills and earned trust to drive without supervision. But teens face new risks as solo drivers. That's why there should still be restrictions on driving privileges while teens gain more experience. Your Family Plan and Parent/Teen Agreement provide critical guidance during this time. See information on pages 25-26.

12

### HOW TO WRITE A STRONG FAMILY PLAN WITH PARENT/TEEN AGREEMENT

The Family Plan and Parent/Teen Agreement help you set clear expectations that both teen and parent understand and agree upon. It sets your family rules for teen driving. Use it to determine parameters that will reduce your teen's driving risks during the first six to 12 months of solo driving. The Agreement is on pages 51-52.





MANAGE YOUR **TEEN DRIVER'S**  
**EXPERIENCE**  
FROM BEGINNER TO INDEPENDENT DRIVER



# Teens' risk of being in a car crash during the first 12 to 24 months of driving is higher than at any other point in their lives.

Families are right to worry about their teen drivers. Vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death and injury for American teenagers between the ages of 15 and 19. Moreover, one out of every five 16-year-olds will be in a car crash. Some will be minor, while others will be very serious.

The first objective of this Guide is to present the scientific evidence that defines the risks that teen drivers face. The second objective is to show you proven ways to reduce those risks. The third objective is to encourage family members to work together and stay involved throughout the first two years of teen driving.

## Driving: A Complex Task

Everybody understands that complex tasks take time and practice to learn. A dancer spends years in practice before being ready for the stage. A pitcher spends hundreds of hours working on his arm, and perfecting his throw, stance, and reflexes. A musician's life is all about practice, preparing for that solo.

Mastering a complex task requires a lot of time and repetition. We must perform the same task over and over, introducing slight variations as we go. This is how we learn to respond without thinking consciously about it.

The same is true of driving. It's a skill that takes years to master. However, there is one critical difference between driving and most other complex tasks: errors behind the wheel can result in life-changing consequences unequaled by those from dance, sports, or music. Even a minor driving error can lead to crashes, injuries, property damage, financial expenses, and heartaches.

In more than any other activity teens are learning, we need to get involved to minimize the exceedingly high risks that come with being a teen driver.

Reducing the chances of a crash starts with a commitment by teen and parent to work together to take control and manage the teen's journey to becoming an independent driver.

## What Are the Risks?

Driving is inherently risky. No matter who is behind the wheel, there is always the risk of a crash. But for teens, the risk of being in a car crash during the first 12 to 24 months of driving is higher than at any other point in their lives. And that's true for all teens – regardless of where they live or their personality type. High crash risks among teen drivers are related to their age and lack of driving experience.

The common thinking is that thrill-seekers and risk-takers are the primary cause of crashes. Not so. While risky behavior does increase the chances of a crash, teens who are not risk-takers and who are responsible, smart, “good” kids can make mistakes or errors in judgment when driving. All teens are at great risk during the first two years of driving.

Driver safety isn't about physical ability, either. If quick reflexes and reaction time were what made drivers safer, then teens would be the safest drivers. Teenagers have much better reflexes and reaction times than adults do. But even after teenagers have many hours of practice, the first years of driving are still the most dangerous for them.

Crashes occur because of many reasons, such as inexperience, distractions, road conditions, and other factors that have





nothing to do with who teenagers are. The research shows us that teenagers in certain situations, not with certain characteristics, are at higher risk for crashes. For example, teens driving at night and with passengers are 4-5 times more likely to crash than are teens driving alone during the day. The good news is the same research has guided us in developing ways to reduce that risk.

### **The Effectiveness of a Graduated Approach to Teen Driving**

We know that a graduated approach to teen driving is an effective way to reduce teen driver risks. Nearly all states have enacted laws, referred to as Graduated Driver Licensing or GDL, that do just that.

GDL is designed to slowly introduce teenagers into the traffic environment in phases, over an extended period of time. The learning or permit phase allows plenty of time for new teen drivers to get much-needed supervised practice driving. Then, the intermediate or provisional phase allows new teen drivers to gain valuable independent driving experience in low-risk situations, but does not allow teens to drive unsupervised in the most dangerous situations.

State GDL programs have reduced crash risk of the youngest drivers by 20% to 40% (Shope, JSR, 2007). Some form of GDL is in place in nearly all states in the U.S. and in many countries around the world. It is the new, accepted way to manage teen driving.

The benefits of managing the teen's driving experience have proven to be effective. But it's not a silver bullet. It's a process. Learning to drive takes time for both teen and parent – many hours over a two-year period.

It begins with the teen getting a learner's driving permit, and continues through months of practice. The highest-risk period for a teen begins after he gets his license. Restrictions on that license for the first six to 12 months and 1,000 miles of driving keep the teen's exposure to crash risk to a minimum. Driving at night and driving with teen passengers in the car are two conditions that carry the highest chance of a teen crashing, so restricting access to these conditions is top priority on the "provisional" license. (We'll discuss all this information, including the scientific evidence that supports it, in the pages that follow.) All during this time, teen and parent are working together, driving together, and managing this new experience as a family.

The steps outlined in this Guide are designed to work with the GDL laws in your state. If you don't have some form of GDL, then the method we recommend is all the more important to your teen's protection during this time.

Actively managing the teen's learning process – not just letting this happen to your family – works best when parent and teen approach learning to drive as a joint effort. You can't skip ahead, or do just one portion and not another, and get the full benefit that's possible. Both teen and parent come to the table with important responsibilities.

### **Parents: Stay Involved, Set Expectations**

For the parent, it begins with a commitment to spend time in the passenger seat. You need to be with your teen driver during the time it will take him to go from beginner, to apprentice driver with a learner's permit supervised by an adult, to an intermediate driver with a provisional license – still gaining experience, still driving within limits you've set as a family.

Don't forget that driving is a privilege that you, the parent, can grant – or should



deny, if you don't think your teen is ready. At each step, you need to review your teen's progress, and decide if he's ready for more responsibility. This is about more than skills and experience. It also must be based on a teen's maturity and judgment. Does he take driving, and the risks he faces, seriously?

Start thinking now about what you need to see in your teen for him to earn his license. Setting expectations up front with stated consequences is simply good parenting.

Discuss the risks of driving and safety measures to counteract that risk with your teen now, whatever his age. Soon these discussions should come together in the form of a plan – we call it your Family's Plan – on how the teen will go from beginner to independent driver. An important part of your Family's Plan comes later, after the teen gets his license. The Parent/Teen Agreement is a formal safety agreement defining driving privileges, restrictions, and consequences. (The Parent/Teen Agreement is discussed in the section on "Promoting Compliance with Privileges and Consequences.") But first, parent and teen need to have a broad overview of the whole process.

Take a look at the following sections of the Guide for facts about the risks and the methods for reducing risk. The better you understand what's at stake, and how each step addresses the special threats of each phase, the better prepared you'll be to sit down and discuss it with your teen.

### Teens: Prepare Yourself, Prove Yourself

Most teens can't wait to get their license. It may seem like it takes forever, but before you know it, you'll be on your own behind the wheel.

Whether that turns into a good experience for you and your parents – confirming their confidence in you – or a bad experience – tow trucks, privileges revoked, injuries, maybe worse – is largely up to you. The danger is there, no matter where you live or who you are. The risk isn't about who you are as a person, but how you get through this high-risk time says a lot about what kind of person you are.

It's your job to take driving seriously, and to consistently show your parents through

your actions that you've been paying attention – not just to driving instruction, but to the real risks you face as a teen driver. The stakes are too high to be satisfied with just going through the motions or doing just enough to get by. This is one test you can't afford to fail.

Show your parents you understand and appreciate the reality of this threat, and respect their expectations of you as you take on more responsibility behind the wheel. More than anything you can say or promise, your demonstrated seriousness can be your best argument that you're ready to move to the next stage of becoming an independent driver.

### Teen and Parent Together: Create Your Family's Plan

In the following pages we will refer often to your Family's Plan. We hope you'll take the facts, suggestions, and advice we give here to actively manage the new driver's experience in a way that suits your family. The form that

takes has to be up to you, and your family's way of doing things.

Take a look at the immediate requirements you think you'll be dealing with in the coming months. Don't wait until your teen is getting his permit. It's important to set expectations about the driving process as soon as a teen begins to talk about it. But a specific lesson plan with dates, etc., may be more than you need just now. Realize that your Family's Plan will evolve over the next months and years as you learn more and the teen progresses. What's needed most now is to set expectations that this is a joint effort, and to get a feel for how you and your teen will best manage this whole process.

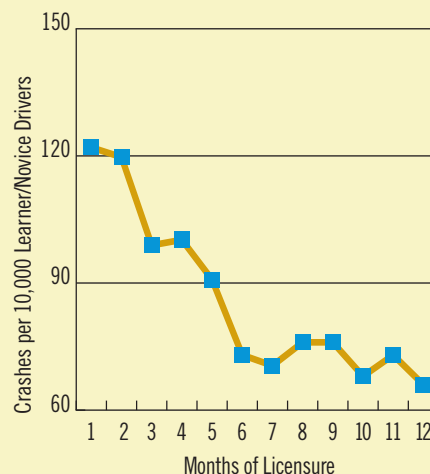
Just by reading this guide, you've already begun. Think of it as an early step in your Family's Plan. At each stage, you can tailor the recommendations here to best manage your teen's driving experience. ▼



## THE SCIENCE SAYS

### Novice Driver's Risk Begins To Drop With Experience

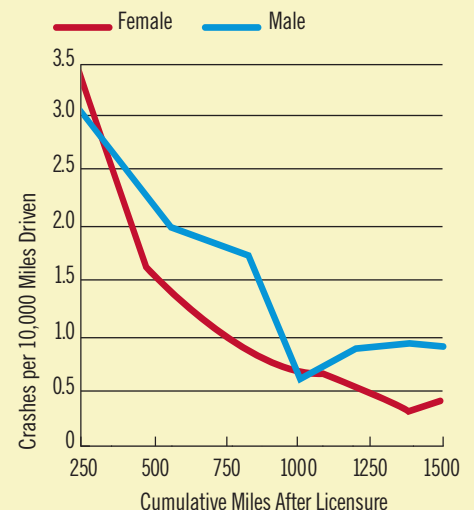
There is a steep drop in the crash risk as new drivers gain experience during the first 12 months of driving.



Source: Mayhew, Simpson & Pak, 2003

### Novice Driver's Risk Begins To Drop With Experience

The crash risk drops by more than 2/3 after the first 1000 – 1500 miles of independent driving.



Source: McCart, Shabanova & Leaf, 2003



## THE LEARNING PHASE

# "A SUPERVISED

A young woman with short, curly brown hair is driving a car, smiling broadly and looking towards the right. She is wearing a yellow ribbed tank top and a seatbelt. In the passenger seat, a young man with short dark hair, wearing a blue polo shirt and a seatbelt, is smiling and looking towards the driver. The car's interior, including the steering wheel and side mirror, is visible. The background shows green foliage outside the car window.



# APPRENTICE”

**The first phase in your journey through teenage driving is the learning phase. This is the time for teens to learn the rules of the road; obtain a learner’s permit; get to know the basics of operating a vehicle; and practice, practice, practice.**

**W**e call a teen driver with her learner’s permit “A Supervised Apprentice” because she is paired with an experienced driver and learns to drive with that person. The experienced driver may be a parent, another relative, a family friend, another appropriate adult, or a combination of these. Whoever it is, that person must be present in the car whenever the teen is behind the wheel, and is responsible for the teen gaining the practice driving experience needed to master this new and complex skill.

Your first encounter with state requirements will be when your teen gets a learner’s permit. While this is not a tough process, it will take some time to research your state’s requirements, collect all the forms you need, and visit the right government office to complete the

application. Most states require the teen to pass a written test about traffic laws, or “rules of the road,” in order to get a learner’s permit. She can’t start learning behind the wheel until after she’s gotten her permit. Once she has the permit, a licensed adult or a Driver Education instructor can give her in-car lessons.

Some states require teens take a Driver Education course; others do not. If your state doesn’t require it, then you’ll need to decide how your teen will get to know the information usually covered in Driver Ed classes. Your options include teaching your teen yourself, or having your teen take a commercial driving class or a computerized on-line course. These options and more are discussed in the upcoming section, “The Role of Driver Education.”

Learning to drive may begin with lessons and classes. But it does not end there. Additional practice driving with a parent or mentor is key. Your teen needs to learn not only the mechanics of driving when behind the wheel, but also how to be a safe, responsible driver. Extended supervised practice is a central part of the best practices for increasing the safety of novice drivers, and should play a large part in any teen’s driving experience. ▼



# THE PERMIT PROCESS

**M**ost 15-year-olds know how to obtain their learner's permit, and if they don't, they have plenty of friends who do. In the world of 15-year-olds, this is no mystery.

This is a good opportunity for the teen to take responsibility for his learning process. Make his first task to get the forms and information he needs from the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) or a bureau with a similar name (such as Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA)). The Internet or phone book can help you locate a branch office close to you. In person, on the Web or by mail, your

DMV will give the teen a packet that includes the rules, regulations, and what is expected of a new driver at each stage of the driver licensing process. Together, parent

and teen should review and outline the requirements of your state's laws.

In most places, the teen will be required to fill out an application, present proof of identity and age, and provide evidence of parental consent. In nearly every state, a parent or guardian will have to go with the teen to the licensing office to give permission for him to apply for a learner's permit. Most states require the teen to pass a test of basic knowledge about the rules of the road. Once the permit is issued, the apprentice driver can begin supervised practice driving, but is allowed behind the wheel only when a licensed adult driver is present.

## ARE STATE REQUIREMENTS ENOUGH FOR YOUR FAMILY?

The permit phase is the first of several steps during the licensing process where you need to pay attention to what your state requires. This is important not only so you and your teen follow the law, but also so you can decide if the state's rules meet your standards for safety. Too often laws fall short and provide only some of the safety benefits available to you. (See page 55, "The Effect of Your State Law," which summarizes various provisions of GDL laws in the U.S.)

No matter what your state's DMV requires, your family should manage your teen's learning

process to help reduce the risks your teen driver faces.

## WHAT'S THE RIGHT AGE TO START LEARNING TO DRIVE?

Your state law determines the minimum age your teen can begin the licensing process. In most states, the age of 15, give or take a few months, is the earliest a teen can apply for a learner's permit. But is that right for your family? No matter what age your state allows, you should determine the right age for your teen to begin.

**There is general agreement among highway safety professionals and research scientists that teenagers should not start their licensing process before the age of 16...**

The earlier your teen gets his learner's permit, the earlier he could be a fully licensed driver on the road. Research evidence clearly indicates that the younger the teen, the greater the exposure to risk. The difference in judgment, risk assessment, and maturity between a 15-year-old and a 16-year-old, or a 16-year-old and 17-year-old, has a great impact on a teen's overall driving performance.

**...but delaying the time when a teen starts driving doesn't solve the entire problem.**

A delay in the start date of a learner's permit alone doesn't offset all of the risk. Research data show that all drivers are more likely to crash in their first six months of driving. The difference in the risks faced by





**“ No matter what age your state allows, you should determine the right age for your teen to begin. ”**

17-year-olds and 16-year-olds is real, but doesn't counteract the danger enough to be a complete solution to the problem. Delaying a year can reduce the teen's risk exposure by a year, but creating a safer driver is about a combination of things including age, maturity, and driving experience.

#### **WHEN WILL YOUR TEEN BE READY?**

Clearly, older and more mature teenagers are better prepared to start

the driving process. This also reduces the total risks that they will be exposed to. But there are things other than age to consider when deciding if your family's teen is ready to start driving.

Parents know their teens' maturity, judgment, trustworthiness, and consistency in following rules. If a teen's general behavior is unreliable, then it's unlikely that it'll get better when he's behind the wheel of a car.

Nearly every state lets the parents decide when the teen is ready.

Written permission is usually required for a teen under the age of 18 to get a learner's permit, and then again to get a driver's license. A parent can have a teen's license revoked up until the time the teen has reached his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. Driving is a privilege that can be granted, or denied, based on the parent's judgment of a teen's readiness. That decision is about safety, and no one else can make it for the parent. ▼

## **ADVICE**

- ✓ Start setting expectations as soon as your family's teen starts talking about driving. The sooner he understands what's expected, the easier going it'll be for everyone.
- ✓ When will your teen be ready to begin learning to drive? Our advice: Apply for a learner's permit no earlier than age 16. Observe the minimums set by state law, but beyond that, this decision should be made by parents, and be based on your judgment of your teen's readiness.
- ✓ Make it the teen's responsibility to find out how to get a learner's permit and what's needed for getting a license, through your local Motor Vehicle Administration.
- ✓ Teen and parent should begin developing your Family's Plan that outlines the new driver's learning process. Your Family's Plan can be written or simply be the conversation that takes place when parent and teen review materials from the Motor Vehicle Administration. Set goals and expectations, and develop a timeline. A plan makes the process manageable, and gives everyone a sense of progress.

## **PERMIT PROCESS**

- ✓ Take time now, when the teen is studying for his permit test, to discuss rules of the road and the dangers and penalties that come from bad choices (drinking and driving, failing to buckle up, speeding) and distractions (cell phones, sound system, friends in the car, etc.). This is a good time to lay the groundwork for more serious talks down the road.
- ✓ Begin discussing Driver Education and supervised practice driving. You'll find more information about these subjects in the next two sections.
- ✓ Parent: This is your first chance to find out how you and your teen will work together to handle this process. It's a time to set expectations on both your parts.
- ✓ Teen: This is your first chance to show you take the responsibility of becoming a driver seriously. Treat this with the same attention you bring to a tough subject in school, or a sport you want to do well in. This is one "course" you have to ace.



# THE ROLE OF DRIVER EDUCATION

**A**fter your teen has her learner's permit, you need to decide how she'll be taught the basics about operating a vehicle and by whom.

Your state may require that your teen take a Driver Education course. If so, Driver Ed will be offered

through your school or a commercial firm. If not, you may have to find answers to a few questions: How will your novice driver learn the general rules of the road, vehicle operation, and state traffic laws that Driver Ed covers? Will it be up to you to take the time to teach her, in addition to spending the necessary

hours of supervised practice driving? Are there books and software that can take the place of parts of Driver Ed? Should you enroll her in a commercial Driver Education course?

Even if Driver Education is available, teen and parent should be asking some important questions: What specific driving skills will come from Driver Ed? How much can your family count on Driver Ed alone to keep teenagers safe? "Taking control and managing this process" includes assessing the available resources. Don't just accept what the system provides. Take another look to be sure it meets your safety requirements.

## THE CHANGING FACE OF DRIVER EDUCATION

Just a few years ago, Driver Ed was almost always taught by the school system. However, this is changing.

Over the years, data collection from car crashes became more complete. Researchers compared crash statistics for teens who took Driver Ed and those who didn't, and found little or no difference. Well-controlled studies from around the world have repeatedly shown that graduates of Driver Ed classes are no less likely to be in crashes than drivers who have had no formal driver education.

There's no question that Driver Education teaches teens the mechanics of driving. But Driver Ed





courses typically provide only a few hours of behind-the-wheel driving, and focus only on the rules of the road, signs and pavement markings and managing the vehicle. These are necessary elements to learn, but they are not significant factors in reducing crash involvement of teens.

This information, coming at a time of shrinking public budgets, caused many states to cut back or cancel their Driver Ed programs altogether. Others have changed their laws to encourage commercial Driver Education courses to compete with, or even replace, public programs.

## CONVENTIONAL DRIVER EDUCATION

Conventional Driver Education continues to be the blueprint for most Driver Ed courses. A good, conventional course will teach vehicle operation, rules of the road, and how to handle a car in different kinds of traffic environments. Classroom instruction provides the novice teen driver with information on legal responsibilities, driving skills and techniques, and local traffic laws. In-car instruction, although usually no more than six to 10 hours total, is often the teen's first experience behind the wheel. It is designed to expose the apprentice driver to many different driving conditions and techniques in a short period of time.

Too often, the only standard that driver education courses and providers are judged by is whether teens pass the written and driving tests. When teens' and parents' focus is limited to "getting the license," the larger, more critical issue of "becoming a safe driver" can be overlooked.

## BEYOND CONVENTIONAL DRIVER EDUCATION

Professionals in the Driver Education community are actively working on reinventing Driver Ed. Some are taking into account the success of the phased approach to learning to drive, and are adopting practices incorporated in GDL laws. These programs encourage parental involvement, promote lots of time spent in supervised driving practice, and emphasize the special risks teens face in their first years on the road. The thinking is that the reduced risk a graduated process provides, together with traditional Driver Ed and parental guidance, will create a real safety bonus for teens who are learning to drive now.

Specialized course material, instruction methods, and technologies are all being used to find better ways to teach teens the rules of the road and how to be safer drivers. A search on the Internet or a trip to your local library will show you the variety of new products and services available.

There are courses that focus on perceptual skills, to help teens improve their risk awareness and space management. Technology plays a role never available to prior generations as well. At school and at home, teens have access to games and software tools intended to help sharpen their driving skills. Simulators are used in some commercial and public Driver Ed programs. New theories on how best to integrate Driver Ed into a phased approach to the licensing process within states' GDL guidelines are also being explored. State governments, insurance companies, and highway safety organizations all offer a range of written and electronic educational tools to the family with a new driver.

## BEWARE OF "TIME DISCOUNTS"

(Less time as an apprentice in exchange for taking Driver Education)

**In Nova Scotia, a three-month "time discount" reduced the period 16-year-olds spent holding a learner's permit from six months to three, if the teen took Driver Education. Great idea, right? Wrong.**

**A 27% higher crash rate in the first six months of driving — 20% overall in the first year — was the result. Licensed teen drivers who had taken Driver Education and received the time discount had more crashes than those who did not take Driver Education and spent the full learner's period behind the wheel.**

**This does not tell us that Driver Education makes bad drivers. It tells us that driver education does not replace the safety benefits that the teen gains from even three additional months of learning and practice time.**



Some parents and teens have found these extra study guides and training methods helpful. But while many of these additional resources show promise and some of them are being evaluated, it's too early to know whether they'll yield solid and predictable safety benefits. They should supplement, not replace, the proven safety benefits of increased practice and restricted access to high-risk conditions (See "The Provisional Phase," page 24, "A Passenger Restriction," page 27, and "A Nighttime Restriction," page 32.)

### GETTING THE MOST FROM YOUR DRIVER EDUCATION COURSE

No matter which Driver Education program you take, spend some time getting to know its strengths and weaknesses. Look at what it will and will not teach your teen. Keep in

mind, completing a Driver Education course, even a very good one, is simply not a full preparation for being a safe driver. It's only the beginning.

The parent should participate in the teen's Driver Education as much as possible. Review class work, talk to the teen, and think about ways to build on information Driver Ed provides. Driver Education that includes the basic principles of a phased approach to learning to drive is Driver Education that can support and strengthen your Family's Plan for your new driver.

But "support," not "replace," the Family's Plan, is key here. Practice, practice, and more practice; restrictions for the highest-risk driving conditions; and granting privileges gradually as the driver gains experience are all necessary steps for teen driver safety. There are no sure shortcuts,

even with the latest high-tech teaching methods.

There are many claims being made about the effectiveness of these new methods, but there is simply no proof yet that they work. We all wish there was an easy way to protect our teens against risk, such as a book or a class that would make them crash-proof. Research on teen driving shows that it's just not that easy.

Parental involvement is, truly, the cornerstone of teen driver safety. It's where the quality of a teen's learning experience begins and ends. We can't expect Driver Education providers to increase their services to cover the number of hours of driving supervision needed to fully prepare the apprentice; not without major additional expense. Parents, who know their teens and are committed to protecting their families, are the best at this job. ▼

## ADVICE

### DRIVER EDUCATION

- ✓ Find out if state law requires your teen take Driver Education. If not, decide how the teen will learn the rules of the road and basic driving skills that Driver Ed teaches. This is another great opportunity for the teen to take responsibility for her driving education by researching the options for sources of Driver Ed.
- ✓ If you have a choice of a Driver Ed provider, we recommend you select one that includes Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) practices and the best safety practices described in this Guide. Two key features to look for in a Driver Ed course:
  - 1 Supports the basic best practices of a graduated approach to learning to drive. (See "The Provisional Phase," page 24, "A Passenger Restriction," page 27, and "A Nighttime Restriction," page 32.)
  - 2 Encourages (or at least allows) parental participation — especially by linking the course's in-car instruction with parent-provided supervised practice driving.
- ✓ If you do not have a choice of a provider, then review the Driver Education course your teen must take and decide if you'll want to add to that course to meet the safety requirements of your Family's Plan.
- ✓ To supplement and build on Driver Ed, search the Internet or go to your library to review the many computer-based lessons, driving schools, books, and lesson plans. Don't forget to look at what other states may offer.



# LEARNING TO DRIVE AND SUPERVISED PRACTICE



**Y**ou're about to start a process that is one of the critical features of managing the teen driving experience: supervised practice driving. Your pay-off in safety comes straight from your investment in time and effort. The hours you and your teen spend now could save you both a world of trouble. Before you're done, the novelty may have worn off this new, demanding activity where the teen is at the wheel and the parent is in the passenger seat. But those unexpected false starts by the teen driver and the gasps for breath by the parent will be past, too.

The learner's permit is a license to learn, not a license to drive independently. Whenever a teen gets behind the wheel, a licensed driver must accompany him. The whole purpose of the permit is to allow the teen to get hands-on experience driving a car before facing the risks and challenges of solo driving. Today's apprentices with learner's



permits are required to get a lot more supervised time behind the wheel than their parents ever were. Instead of the traditional six to ten hours from Driver Education, with a few trips with mom or dad in the car, now novice drivers are asked to spend 30, 40, 50 hours or more driving with a supervisor in the car. Researchers strongly encourage as many hours as possible, the more the better. Some parents do as many as 100 hours.

### WHY SO MUCH PRACTICE?

Think of the many complex skills we use when we react to avoid a collision. Our response must be almost immediate, counting on our ability to predict how people and cars will react, our knowledge of driving technique, how well we know the car and the road we're traveling, and dozens of other factors, each a little different depending on the situation and the driver. These skills can't be learned just by reading a book, or spending a few hours behind the wheel. Responses don't become automatic without several levels of learning. First, we must learn the basics, including how to maneuver the vehicle. Then, we need to spend a lot of time practicing what we've learned. Finally, with enough practice in enough different environments, we slowly gain the experience we need to react effectively and safely while driving. All of this adds up to plenty

of time behind the wheel, over a period of months, with the guidance and encouragement of a mentor.

### WHO IS GOING TO SUPERVISE? — FINDING THE RIGHT COMBINATION

Take heart – learning to drive, when it's with parental supervision, is surprisingly safe. Serious crashes almost never happen when an adult is supervising a teen. Even minor crashes are rare, and common sense tells us the few crashes that do happen are probably because the novice teen driver has been placed in a situation he isn't yet ready to handle.

But learning does involve making mistakes. There will be rough starts and stops as the teen learns how hard to press the brake and the gas, and at some point both people in the car will probably be embarrassed, frustrated, and anxious. Some uneasiness is normal for both people in the car. Some teens find this situation even scarier than their parents do. This task requires patience from driver and supervisor alike.

But sometimes friction between individual teens and parents is just too much when learning to drive. Great parents do not necessarily make good driving coaches, and at times great teens are not good driving students. It takes time for teenagers to find their "groove" as a driver. Sometimes a parent can see a

problem coming, and sometimes not. Families with more than one teen have often seen one supervisor-apprentice combination work well and another combination be a disaster.

The personality of both teen and parent and the nature of their relationship as they go into this experience will affect how well things go. Both should be aware of this. It may mean that parents have to share or even permanently switch off supervision duties. They may decide to find a relative or family friend who can better fill the supervisor role.

Finding a personality mix and teaching style that work are important. Allowing a teen to move to the next stage without finishing the needed hours of supervised practice driving because of personality conflicts is a big mistake. Don't throw away critical safety benefits that are best gained during the learner's permit stage.

### ADOPT A LESSON PLAN

There's a lot of material to review, lessons to cover, and months to go before you finish learning the basics and practicing what you've learned. The parent should be thinking about the best way for you both to get in all the required hours of supervised practice driving. The parent and teen should work together to develop a lesson plan for supervised practice driving, so you both understand what's expected.



But before you begin your structured lesson plan, it may be helpful to spend a couple of practice driving sessions in a big empty parking lot. Let the teen get a feel for the vehicle and become comfortable with things like starting, stopping, and turning. Not a lot of direction is needed while the teen gets used to the car and everyone gets over the jitters. The satisfaction of actually driving and the comfort he'll gain as he gets a feel for the car will make later lessons more productive.

Now you're ready to put your driving lesson plan in place. Experts agree that you should adopt a lesson outline in advance. In each practice session, the supervisor should think about how many new things are being introduced. Keep it simple at the start, and then add new twists as the novice driver improves. For instance, how to approach and stop at a stop sign, or the correct way to make a turn, would be in one of a teen's first lessons. This is learning the basics. Later on, as the teen gains experience, lessons can cover more advanced skills, like changing lanes on multi-lane streets, and merging into highway or Interstate traffic. Now he's practicing what he's learned, as well as dealing with new environments and driving skills.

Your overall lesson plan should include driving at different times and in different places. At the start, choose quiet neighborhood streets during the day in clear conditions.

## YOU MAY ENJOY THIS

**Are you always complaining you have no time as a family? Does it feel like you never get a chance to talk, just parent and teen? Practice driving can change that.**

**A North Carolina, GDL-related study conducted over three years interviewed parents and teens after 30 hours of supervised practice driving time. The question, "Has helping your teen learn to drive had any of the following effects?" resulted in the following selection of replies:**

- **71% of parents and 52% of teens: "We enjoy this time together."**
- **A low 8% of parents and 16% of teens: "We get on each other's nerves."**
- **And only 2% of parents said they didn't like doing the practice at all.**



## "DO WHAT I SAY, NOT WHAT I DO"

**Parents should be prepared to become the object, not always the origin, of driving "instruction." Surprise! You've been a role model for your new teen driver for years. Now that he's learning the "do's and don'ts" of driving, he may feel the need to correct you when he sees your bad habits behind the wheel. Teaching a teen to drive can make us all better drivers!**



## CREATING A LESSON PLAN FOR PRACTICE DRIVING:

There are many sources that can assist you to create a lesson plan for your teen's practice driving.

See page 65 for a list of states that have good information for helping teen drivers.

The American Driver & Traffic Safety Education Association has a comprehensive Parent Guide for practice driving. See their Web site at: [www.adtsea.iup.edu](http://www.adtsea.iup.edu) or contact ADTSEA at:

**ADTSEA/NSSP**  
**Indiana University of Pennsylvania**  
**R & P Building**  
**Indiana, PA 15705**  
**phone: 800-896-7703 M-F 8:00 am - 4:30 pm EST**  
**Email: [velian@hsc.iup.edu](mailto:velian@hsc.iup.edu)**

Then gradually build the teen's comfort level on busier roads until he's ready to tackle more challenging traffic patterns and speeds. When he's ready, get him to try the trips he's mastered during the day, but at dusk and after dark. Think about all the environments he'll soon face as a driver on his own and give him time to practice in those situations, including rain and snow or other winter driving.

A lesson plan may have been included in the packet from your Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA) when you applied for the learner's permit. Also, there are a wide variety of publications, computer-based guides, and other products for learning to drive and lesson plans for practice driving. A search on the Internet or a trip to your library can help you learn more about the many products available.

In addition, many states offer lesson plans on-line. If you have access to the Internet, you can look at other states' lesson plans for elements you want to include in yours.

### HOW MANY MONTHS? HOW MANY PRACTICE HOURS?

Your state law may require a minimum number of months a novice driver must remain in the learner's permit phase. Many states also require a minimum number of supervised practice hours that must be completed before a teen driver is eligible to move to the next stage. The important word here is "*minimum*."

You can't count on state law to reflect what we are beginning to understand as a complete safety standard – or the best practice.

Some states have brief or no minimum time requirements for holding a learner's permit. State laws also have very different requirements for the number of supervised practice hours – from none to as many as 60.

We know crash rates have gone down in states that adopted GDL systems. One of the more common requirements in those systems is extended periods and more hours of supervised driving during the learner's permit phase. We don't always know why or how much, but the success of GDL and years of experience in highway safety suggest that your Family's Plan should extend the period of time (at least 9 to 12 months) and the number of hours (50 or more) to give your teen driver a greater safety benefit.

State-required "minimums" are adopted for all new teen drivers based on assumptions and compromises. These minimums don't define when the teen in your family will become a competent driver. Only the parent, who has daily experience and firsthand knowledge of the teen's driving abilities, can make this vital decision.

### FROM "SUPERVISED APPRENTICE" TO "TRUSTED INTERMEDIATE"

The teen who started out just getting a feel for the gas pedal – while the



## DESIGNATE APPROVED SUPERVISORS

The law requires that a teen driving with a learner's permit always be accompanied by an adult licensed driver – “adult” often being defined as “over 21 years old.” Yet “over 21” may, in many cases, be too young and too inexperienced to provide the supervision and guidance you expect for your teen driver. Some risk is associated with passengers up to the age of 29.

Your Family's Plan should include a rule that reinforces the “always supervised” provision, and, to avoid any misunderstanding, designate the approved “supervisors” by name.

parent was searching for the brake on the passenger side – has come a long way by the end of the learner's permit phase. After 50 hours or more of practice, the focus has probably shifted from “learning and practice” to “gaining experience and honing skills.” Some other things might not have changed much. There's a good chance the parent is (still) commenting on when and how to slow down before a turn, and the teen is (still) telling the parent he doesn't need to be told because he knows what he's doing.

Now the question is: “When is the teen driver ready to begin driving

alone?” As you will learn in the next section, teens driving without supervision are exposed to a much higher chance of crashing – quite possibly the highest risk they will experience in their lives. No matter how good a driver your teen may be, there's a serious level of risk that simply comes with being independent behind the wheel.

That risk begins the first time he takes the car out alone. Even after all the experience your apprentice has gained, driving by himself is a whole new ball game. It's like the musician stepping out in front of an audience for the first time, or a pitcher

stepping up to the mound. When practice is over, the performance brings new challenges. A different tactic is needed to deal with these risks. It will take some effort to keep the teen focused on a gradual introduction to independence – especially once he has his license.

So now that you've finished the practice hours required and planned, take a moment and ask yourself: “Was it enough? Is he really ready?” Now is the time to assess your teen's readiness to begin driving solo, before you let him move on to the Provisional License phase. ▼

## ADVICE

- ✓ It's important for parent and teen to start talking about supervised practice and its role in the Family's Plan before the teen gets a learner's permit. The earlier expectations are set, the easier the process will be.
- ✓ We recommend your Family's Plan be developed around a minimum of 50 hours of supervised practice driving or more, to be logged over a 9- to 12-month period.
- ✓ The plan should include a rule that the apprentice be supervised at all times by a licensed driver. Name the licensed driver or drivers the parent approves to supervise the teen's driving practice.
- ✓ If there is more than one supervisor, be sure to coordinate schedules and lesson plans so the teen is getting consistent guidance and instruction.

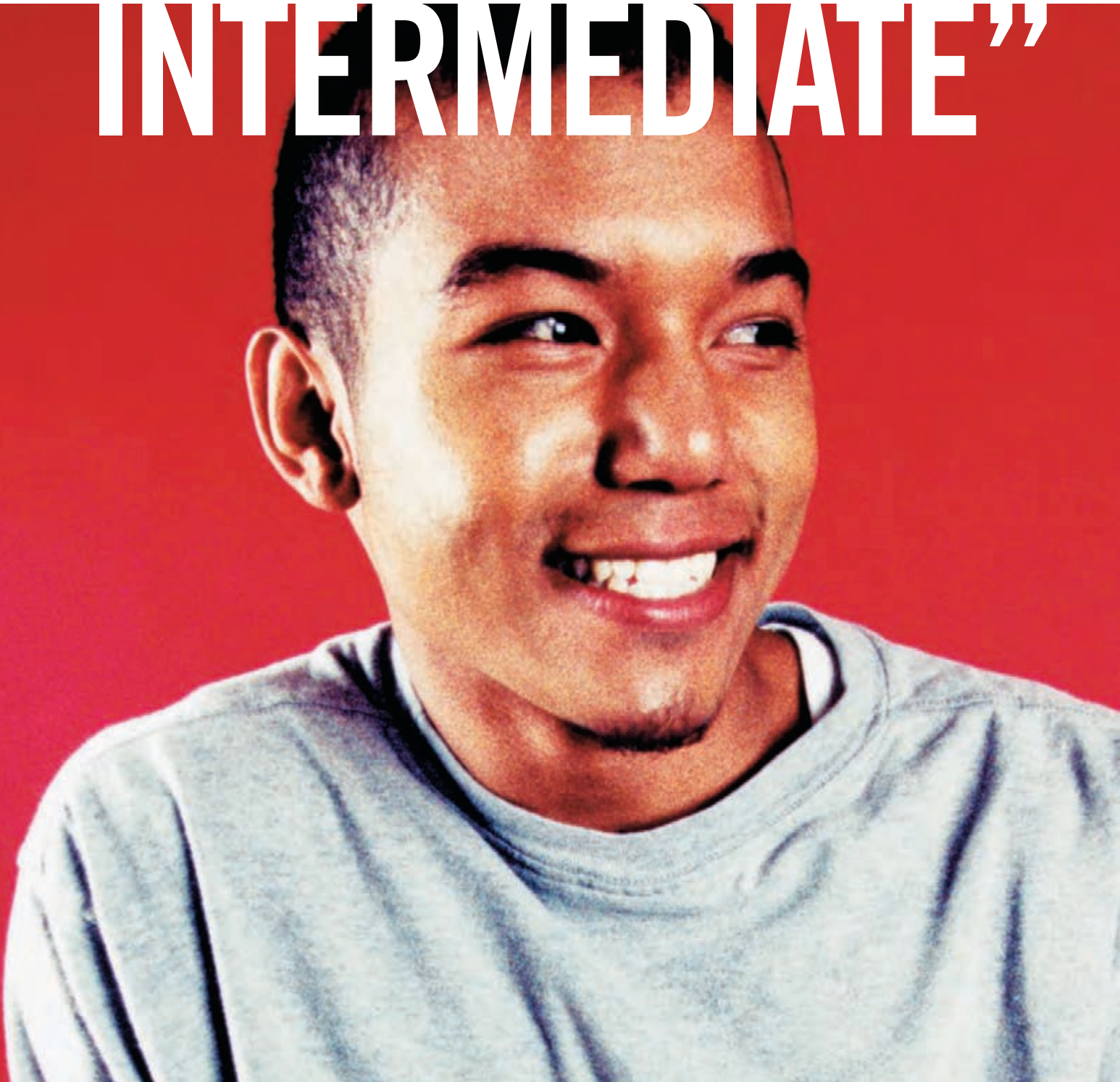
## SUPERVISED PRACTICE

- ✓ Choose a lesson plan to take you through the steps of learning to drive. You can combine state-designed plans and other resources to create your own, custom lesson plan.
- ✓ Once the teen's comfort level and competence behind the wheel have grown, look for occasions to include practice driving in your family's daily routine. If you're both going somewhere and the parent is driving, ask yourself why — and then switch places.



THE PROVISIONAL PHASE

# “A TRUSTED INTERMEDIATE”





The newly licensed teen is “trusted” because she has now acquired the skills and earned the trust to drive on her own without supervision. Yet the teen is an “intermediate” driver because there are new risks the teen will face as a solo driver. That’s why there should still be some provisions (restrictions) on her driving privileges while she gains more experience and earns full driving privileges. So, when the teen thinks, “After all those hours of supervised practice and passing my license test, don’t I get to drive solo?” **THE ANSWER IS, “YES, BUT...”**

**R**esearch tells us that the first months of unsupervised driving are particularly risky for all drivers. But it’s an even more risky time for teen drivers. That same research also tells us that novice teen drivers have better odds for safety when there is an “intermediate period” that includes temporary restrictions on the highest-risk situations: driving with passengers (especially teenage passengers) and driving at night. Every teen faces these risks, regardless of who the teen is or where she lives. Despite any inconveniences these restrictions might cause, they are an essential part of any family’s safe journey through the teen driving process.

Introducing a teen driver gradually to more high-risk conditions is the basic idea of GDL’s phased approach to managing teen driving, and it is a major factor in reducing teen crash rates. This section of the Family Guide will help you work these “best practices” into your Family’s Plan.

But, first, both parents and teens need to understand what the risks really are, and why it’s so important to accept any inconveniences and delayed gratification that restrictions are going to mean. This is another important milestone in your family’s teen driving experience where the payoff in safety comes straight from your investment and follow-through.

### **New and Added Risks**

Driving solo is a very different experience for a teen than driving with an adult supervisor. All of the hours teen and parent have spent practicing are important, but they can’t cancel out all the new dangers that the teen driver faces when she begins to drive alone.

**The very low crash risk found in supervised driving ends when independent driving begins.** The relative safety of supervised practice driving is probably due to several factors: the teen’s caution as a beginner; her attention to doing things right



while a parent is in the car; and for some, the comfort level of having an experienced driver in the car. For many teens, these benefits leave the car when the parent does. This section talks about the new and added risks during the early months of solo driving that all novice drivers are exposed to.

We know that the number of crashes is highest during the first six to 12 months of independent teen driving. Even though we do not know all of what makes driving alone so different and dangerous, it still makes sense. Like any high-performance activity, there is a world of difference between practice and the real thing.

Think about a basketball player who shoots hoops for hours, works hard with the coach, but still makes errors after she suits up and finally gets in the game. This new situation may throw the novice off her game in small but important ways that would not affect a seasoned player. It may be like the musician who has practiced her piece and knows it cold, but then because of nerves stumbles and overcorrects during the recital. Or maybe like the actor on opening night, when the director is no longer there to prompt her when lines are forgotten.

The point is that crashes are not restricted to “bad teens” or reckless drivers. This isn’t about the teen driver’s personality, grade point average, reaction time, or athletic prowess. All teens are subject to the same underlying risks. Sure, there are risk-taking driving behaviors that will increase the likelihood of a crash, such as speeding and tailgating, but even if your new driver exhibits good driving behaviors, she is still at risk.

All novice teen drivers are vulnerable in two particular environments: driving with teen passengers, and driving at night.

### **Consider the Effectiveness of Your State Law**

Nearly all states have added elements of Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) into their driver licensing systems. Your state may have a provisional license phase with a passenger restriction and/or a nighttime restriction. But your state’s requirements alone may not be enough to give your teen the best protection.

You need to make a judgment call when reviewing your state’s teen driver licensing requirements. Just like earlier in this process, doing a thorough job of managing your teen’s driving experience means that you not only know what the law is, but you think about whether it’s enough for your family. If you want the full range of safety benefits outlined in this Guide, you may have to add restrictions to your teen’s driving experience in your Family’s Plan.

### **Ease, Don’t Throw, Your Teen into Driving Independence**

Preventing a teen from driving is not the aim of restrictions. In fact, you want to encourage your newly licensed teen to get a lot of practice driving alone. Experience is the only way that teens become safer drivers. You want your teen to store up experience that she can call upon when it’s needed in the future. But you do not want your teen to begin to drive under conditions that she is not ready to handle yet. Set some controls to help ease your teen into driving independence.

Getting a driver’s license isn’t like taking the training wheels off a bike. A mistake can be a lot more serious than a scraped knee or a banged-up bike. So, at each step, balance the risks to your teen and the experience your teen needs in order to improve.

First, encourage your newly licensed driver to build successes driving alone during the day. Restrict access to the conditions we know to be most dangerous, namely driving with teen passengers and driving at night. Meanwhile, continue to supervise practice driving in these conditions. With a parent in the car, she’ll still gain experience but her risk for crashes is much lower.

Then, when you think your teen is ready, allow her to drive solo at night or with a friend during the day. Start slow with short trips on familiar, quiet routes, just like your early lesson plans for practice driving did. Then you can continue to ease restrictions and your presence from the car gradually, as your teen gains even more valuable experience.

### **The Supervisor Becomes an Observer**

Under the learner’s permit, the teen could not drive without an adult present. Now that

the teen will begin to drive on her own, the parent’s role changes from “supervisor” to “observer.”

Even the most cautious newly licensed teen driver can make errors in judgment, become careless, and pick up bad habits once a supervisor is no longer looking over her shoulder. If the parent continues to ride with the teen once in a while in favorable conditions, and regularly under high-risk conditions, it may help reinforce the teen’s good driving habits. More importantly, it gives the parent a first-hand update on the teen’s driving progress. Riding along as an observer helps the parent measure when to start gradually easing restrictions and granting more privileges until your teen is a restriction-free independent driver.

### **Include a Provisional Driving Phase in Your Family’s Plan**

Make sure that your teen gets months of solo driving experience during the day and supervised practice driving under high-risk driving conditions before she is allowed to drive wherever and whenever by herself.

Now one of your family’s top driving safety priorities should be to create a Parent/Teen Agreement. This Agreement is a safety-focused road map for rules, consequences, and sequences of driving privileges that the teen follows after she gets a license for independent driving (whether it is a “provisional” license or an unrestricted license). Use the following two sections, “A Passenger Restriction” and “A Nighttime Restriction,” to learn about creating effective restrictions on the conditions with the highest crash risks. Then use the information in the section, “Risks from Choices We Make: Unsafe Driving Behaviors,” to set up unconditional rules for safe driving behaviors and consequences for any violations.

Gaining protection for your teen from the different types and degrees of risk isn’t as complicated as it may seem. There is a common method for reducing all types of risks for teen driving: Manage your teen’s driving experience and restrict access to conditions that pose the greatest threat. ▼



# A PASSENGER RESTRICTION

**T**he research evidence indicates that teen drivers are more likely to crash with passengers in the car, especially teen passengers. The more passengers, the greater the risk. With multiple passengers, the risk is 3-5 times that of driving alone.

Teens together in a car, regardless of their attitude, their skill behind the wheel, or the purpose of their trip, are much more likely to crash than a teen driving alone in the vehicle. This research does not separate out teens who “horse around” or have trouble paying attention from those who are serious and focused behind the wheel. We have to assume this risk isn’t about just a teen’s trustworthiness or reliability, or that of the other teens in the car. Teens’ crashes happen not only when they are coming home from a party, but also when they’re on the way to the library.

Passenger restrictions are just one part of Graduated Driving Licensing (GDL) laws that have led to impressive reductions in teen crashes and fatalities. Generally, these restrictions limit teen passengers during the new driver’s first six to 12 months behind the wheel. It makes sense. A passenger restriction allows your newly licensed teen driver to gain the experience needed to master the complex task of driving, while eliminating the risk of (and the risk to) teen passengers.



For parents, we know it is not easy to say “no friends in the car” once your teen has a license. It’s especially tempting to make exceptions for your teen, whom you know is responsible and has worked hard to earn driving privileges. And, you know your teen’s friends are “good kids,” too. As much as your family may want that driving independence for your teen, without a thoughtful plan on how to introduce the teen gradually to high-risk driving situations, it can come at a high cost. If you want your teenager, your car, and your bank account to stay whole, you need to consider the added risks that passengers mean for your teen driver.

## **ALL TEENS ARE AT RISK WHEN DRIVING WITH TEEN PASSENGERS**

Research evidence doesn’t tell us specifically why passengers, especially teens, raise the chances that newly licensed teen drivers will get into a crash, but experience and common sense suggest that distraction plays a major role. Having other teenagers in the car

creates a social environment that can affect driving behavior. There are conversations, negotiations about choices for music, plus comments about what is happening outside the car, that all compete for the driver’s attention. Teens may just be having fun, but it makes for major distractions for the driver.

Driving is a complex task. If we hope to reduce the chance for errors, we need to keep it as simple as possible at first. A novice driver is often nervous and self-conscious about her skills, or, to the contrary, she may be over-confident. These attitudes only make dealing with other potential risk factors, such as weather conditions, traffic patterns, and high-speed driving on highways, harder to deal with. Whatever the dynamic of the teens in the car, the newly licensed teen driver is being affected at exactly the time she most needs to concentrate on the task at hand.

## **A PASSENGER RESTRICTION FOR YOUR FAMILY’S PLAN**

This is a tough assignment for both parents and teens. One of the things



**“ Even a restriction that permits one teen passenger increases the risks, and not just for the driver, but everyone in the vehicle. ”**

that teens look forward to the most about getting a license is being able to go places independently with their friends. One of the things that many parents look forward to is having an additional driver to help out with carpooling and other driving duties that include passengers.

But the teen driver's risk is so high during the first six to 12 months after licensing that the safety benefits from a passenger restriction need to be a higher priority than any inconvenience it may cause.

When there is no supervisor in the car, newly licensed teen drivers are safest when driving alone. Once it's time to start gradually introducing driving with passengers, especially other teens, the parent should look for opportunities to go along for the ride. We don't think mom or dad will be welcome on a date, but a ride to the mall or to the game with the teen's friends might be a good place to start.

Now, having mom or dad in the car may defeat the purpose of driving around with friends for some teens, but it gives the teen a taste of the challenges posed by passenger distractions in a much more controlled way. And, it gives the parent a chance to observe how the new driver is handling herself with others in the car. Soon it will be time for the parent to decide how and when to lift passenger restrictions so that the teen is solely in charge of the vehicle.

As sensible as a passenger restriction is for reducing a teen's exposure to risk, it does not make it any easier for parents, teens, or lawmakers. Passenger restrictions are sometimes misunderstood, misrepresented when discussed as public policy, and can be resisted by teens and parents alike, especially when they are seen as interfering in a teenager's traditional rite of passage to adulthood. We know that even in the best of circumstances a passenger restriction can be an inconvenience. These are all challenges we realize you will face when considering the best course of action for your teen driver.

### **HOW MANY TEENAGE PASSENGERS?**

As always, start with your state's requirements. State law can make it easy to decide on the best passenger restriction for your family. When the law meets your high standards for your family's safety, then you can feel comfortable following it without adding restrictions for your teen. It is a big help when you are not requiring your teen to obey rules that her friends may not have to follow.

But any shift away from that high safety standard comes with a sharp increase in crash risk. A number of states have adopted some passenger restrictions for teenage drivers, but many allow one or even more teenage passengers.

And some states allow exemptions for siblings or other relatives. Research has not made it clear if there is any less risk if the passenger is a sibling. It only tells us the risk increases with each additional passenger.

Even a restriction that permits one teen passenger has major consequences, and not just for the driver, but everyone in the vehicle. The more lenient state laws that allow two, three, or more passengers, or only limit the number of passengers to the number of seat belts in the car, stray so far from the best safety information that one wonders whether the concept of "safety" has gotten lost in the process.

The further your state law is from "no teen passengers" for the first six months after licensing, the harder it will be to set and enforce a stricter, and a safer, rule in your Family's Plan. Setting a passenger restriction is no easier for lawmakers than it is for families. Permitting one teen passenger is often considered the toughest restriction the public will tolerate. However, you are setting rules for your teen, not all the teens in your state. You can decide what is best for your family.

### **EXEMPTIONS FOR FAMILY MEMBERS AS PASSENGERS**

State laws often include exemptions for family members. This is probably because it is a tempting option for families. It is convenient to have



your new teen driver be the family chauffeur for a change. If your teen driver has siblings, you may want to think long and hard about whether you want them riding with her while she is still inexperienced.

We know that passengers increase the chances of a teen driver crashing. However, the research does not distinguish between the crash risk related to teen passengers and siblings as passengers. But common sense and years as a parent suggest that siblings may prove to be greater distractions in the car than other teenage passengers would be. If the siblings in your family argue and frustrate each other at the dinner table, or if they compete with one another constantly, then you can expect that relationship to move with them into the car. Look at sibling relationships realistically.

The family member exemption is about convenience for the family. It is not based on scientific evidence or better safety. Think about what sibling passengers may mean for your teen driver's safety, as well as that of her brothers and sisters.

### COMPETING CONCERNS

The effect of passenger restrictions extends beyond each family.

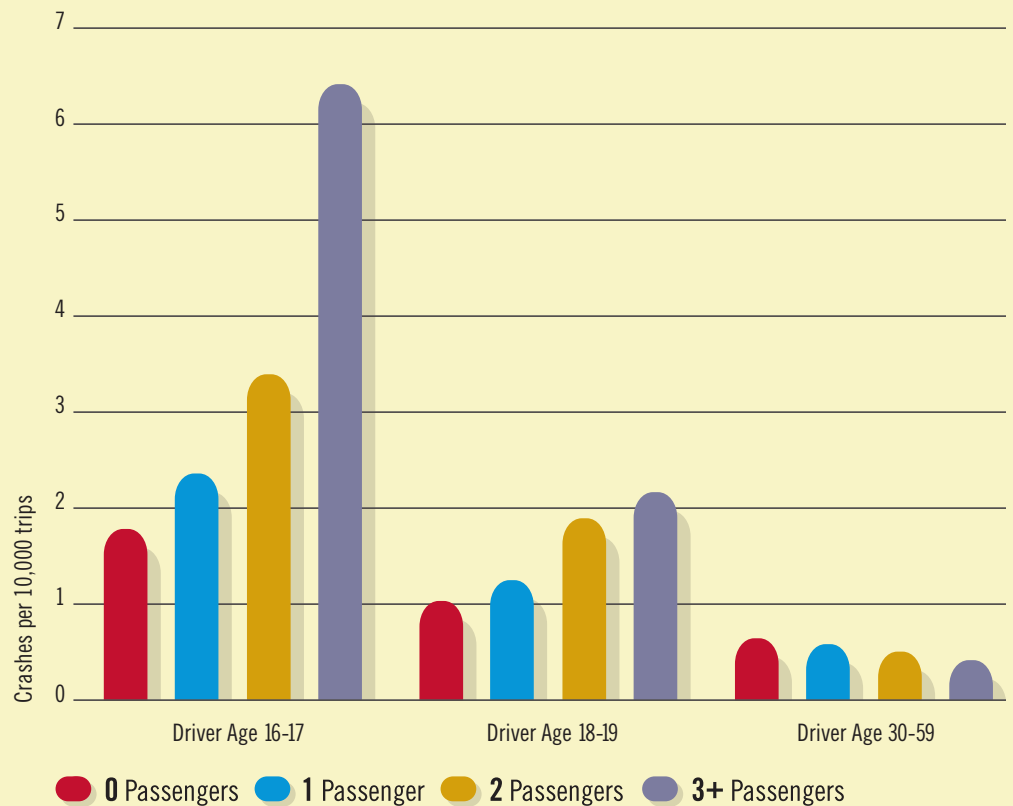
If teens have to drive alone, you would think there would be more teen drivers and more vehicles on the road. As a matter of public policy, that could be a real concern. Here are some common objections that have been raised regarding passenger restrictions:



## THE SCIENCE SAYS

### CRASH RATES BY DRIVER AGE AND # OF PASSENGERS

For 16- to 17-year-old drivers, just one passenger increases crash risk by about 50%. With three or more passengers, the risk is nearly four times greater than while driving alone.



Source: Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS)



## A MESSAGE FOR TEENS. ARE YOU SAFE AS A PASSENGER?

Teens should think twice before getting into a car driven by another teen. Teens together in a car make the ride riskier for everyone, driver and passengers alike.

It may be tough to refuse a lift from a friend, but just about any mode of transportation is safer than riding with a teen driver alone or with other teens. You know how to avoid a dangerous situation. We've given you the facts in this chapter. Now you have to exercise your good judgment and act on what you know.

Remember, this isn't a reflection on your friend's driving ability! Even the best teen drivers face this risk. Would you do something if you knew it doubled your chances of failing a test, or striking out? What if it doubled your chances for failure and your friend's, too? You're doing everyone a favor when you say, "No, thanks. Maybe next time."



### BE A SAFE PASSENGER:

Whether the driver is a sibling or friend, it's your turn to prove that you're worthy of the driver's trust by being a safe passenger.

Help the driver out. You're a guest in the car — act like one. Don't make the driver enforce the rules. Do him — and yourself — a favor.

Is your seat belt buckled? Don't make the driver ask. Are you going to get on your cell phone and start a loud conversation? Change the radio, fiddle with the dashboard controls, call attention to things outside the car? Maybe you have a great story you're dying to tell the driver. Wait until a stoplight, or better yet, wait until the car is in "Park."

Respect the driver's need to concentrate. Don't let anyone else in the car gamble with your safety, either. Wherever you're going, you'll get there faster — and in one piece — if the driver isn't struggling to manage what's going on outside and inside, as well as the vehicle itself, all at once.



**“Increasing the number of teens on the road will increase the number of crashes.”**

The assumption is often: If teens are not allowed to ride together, there will probably be more teen drivers driving more miles, which could increase the overall chances of crashes for everyone. However, the research suggests that the increase in teen crashes resulting from more cars on the road would still be lower than if they were allowed to ride together. In other words, the same numbers of teens in fewer cars are at greater risk than if they each drove solo.

**“Increasing the number of vehicle miles traveled does not encourage environmentally sound transportation practices.”**

While public policy may sometimes be difficult to resolve, individual families can maintain high safety standards and still be environmentally conscious by using public transportation where available, reducing unnecessary trips, driving more slowly, and other methods. It is possible to do both.

**“More vehicles will strain already crowded parking lots at schools.”**

While this may seem a minor issue to some, it's a real concern for others.

Balancing the need to lower the risk of teens crashing their cars with the need for creative solutions to overcrowded parking lots means inconvenience for some and compromise all around. We cannot object to proven safety practices because a problem is tough to resolve.

There are always issues that can be raised, but our purpose is to provide the best safety information for your family. Even if your state does not have a passenger restriction, your family can have a rule that keeps your teen out of this high-risk situation until she has many more months of solo driving experience. ▼

## ADVICE

### PASSENGER RESTRICTION

- ✓ Start with your state's driver licensing policy. Parent and teen should be familiar with any regulations regarding passengers: the number allowed, the period the restriction is in effect, and any exemptions your state law may include. Whatever the minimum imposed by law, we recommend you adopt the following best safety practices:
  - 1 No passengers under the age of \_\_\_\_ permitted to ride with your teen. (You establish the minimum age you believe appropriate.)
  - 2 The restriction should be in effect for a period of the first six months after receiving a license, with an option to renew and extend, depending on when the parent thinks the teen will be ready to take on the added risk of passengers.
- ✓ Remember, any rule less strict than zero teen passengers for the first six months comes with risk attached. There is no evidence that the risk is any less if the passenger is a sibling. Exemptions for siblings are about convenience, not safety.
- ✓ Parent and teen need to discuss the fact that the risk for your teen isn't just when she is the driver, but also when she is a passenger in other teens' cars. Her exposure to this risk is the same in both cases. (See the Message to Teens box above: Are You Safe as a Passenger?)
- ✓ Give the newly licensed driver frequent opportunities to drive with teen passengers – with an adult in the car. List by name the adult licensed drivers who can accompany the teen when teen passengers are present. Make it clear: not just any driver over 21 is okay.
- ✓ Establish consequences for breaking your family's rules. Setting rules and establishing consequences increases compliance by novice teen drivers. A written agreement listing rules and consequences has been helpful for many families. Please see “Setting Expectations—The Parent/Teen Agreement,” page 49.
- ✓ Your teen's friends may not be governed by the same rules. She may feel it's unfair, and have to deal with some tough situations with her friends. Give your teen all the support and encouragement you can.



# A NIGHTTIME RESTRICTION



**W**hen parents think about the high-risk situations that their teen drivers will confront, they rarely include one of the most dangerous: driving at night.

Too often we only focus on the dangers teen drivers face from “risk-taking” and bad judgment, such as drinking and driving, not wearing a seat belt, or speeding. But exposure to risk isn’t strictly behavioral. Some conditions, like driving with teen passengers and driving at night, simply increase crash risk for novice teen drivers all by themselves.

Crash rates increase at night for drivers of all ages. It makes sense. Driving at night just looks different. Think about an intersection you often go through during the day, and how different it can look at night. Driving at night is even more dangerous for teens.

The facts are startling: Mile for mile, 16- and 17-year-old drivers are about three times more likely to be involved in a fatal car crash at night than during the day. The most effective Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) programs take this into account and include nighttime driving restrictions for

teen drivers during the Provisional License phase.

The safety benefits that you’ve worked hard to establish for your teen driver through hours of supervised practice are critical. However, they do not counteract all the new risks that the intermediate driver faces when she drives alone. The danger of solo nighttime driving can be best managed in much the same way as the risk of driving with teen passengers. First, restrict the teen’s driving at night, and then gradually grant more privileges after the first six to 12 months of highest risk.

But so much of a teen’s very active life takes place after dark, and not just social engagements. There are school activities, religious events, and nighttime jobs. While the crash research doesn’t distinguish between driving to an evening study group or home after a party, common sense says some situations are more likely to be ‘trouble’ than others.

You’ll have to judge when and where your teen is ready to drive alone at night. But in general, the answer is: After she’s had a lot of experience driving solo during the day and a lot of supervised driving at night, then she’ll be ready to go it alone at night.

## NIGHTTIME DRIVING POSES UNIQUE RISKS

The patterns of light and shadow, oncoming headlights, and low



visibility all add to the complexity of driving after dark. Nighttime or very early morning is also likely to be the time when a driver is most tired, especially for teens. Teenagers require more sleep than adults do, and most teens have full days, working and playing as hard as they can.

A teen driver is taxing her system when she drives at night, no matter how good a driver she is or where she's headed.

Also, the world of teenage nightlife and driving often includes teen passengers, lower seat belt use, increased incidence of alcohol, and a "good-time" atmosphere that all contribute to other bad driving habits and risky practices. The high risk of night driving is more than just behavior, but these behaviors can definitely make things even worse.

Although research does not tell us all the reasons teen drivers crash risk is so high when they drive at night, it does tell us that a nighttime restriction will substantially lower that risk. As your teen driver's experience increases, and that initial six- to 12-month period of highest risk has passed, your family can decide when and under what circumstances your teen can gradually begin to gain experience driving solo at night.

**A NIGHTTIME RESTRICTION FOR YOUR FAMILY'S PLAN**

This restriction is one of the biggest challenges that teens and parents

will face, because it can be one of the most inconvenient. It is harder in some ways than the passenger restriction, because it limits when a teen can drive, not just with whom she can drive. Family priorities may need to be rearranged, because a few more months of restricted night driving can make a huge difference in safety benefits for your teen, your family, and other people.

It's important to remember that the point of a nighttime driving restriction is not to stop the teen driver from ever driving alone after dark. It is to give her more experience driving solo during the day and accompanied at night, so she will be better prepared when faced with the special challenges of solo night driving.

The more opportunities the teen has to drive at night with a mentor in

carefully chosen trips on routes that she already knows well, the more quickly she'll learn safe driving practices to be able to effectively navigate the nighttime driving landscape. As your teen's comfort levels grow, the restriction can be gradually lifted. When easing nighttime restrictions, parent and teen can use an approach similar to what they did during practice driving: start with short trips on quiet streets, then move on to more challenging driving environments.

A judgment on the need for and worthiness of a night trip should be based on several things, including: the teen's experience level, how well she knows the route, how tired she may be, the purpose of the trip, and weather conditions. These all contribute to your teen's crash risk. Be especially careful when

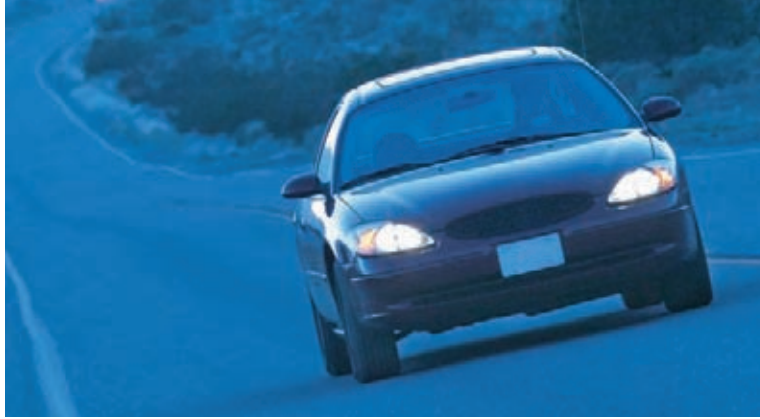


**THE SCIENCE SAYS**

While only 15% of teen drivers' miles occur at night, 40% of their fatal crashes take place during this time.

In a review of data from 47 states over a 10-year period, a nighttime restriction on 15- to 17-year-old drivers reduced multiple-vehicle driver fatality rates by about 28% and single-vehicle rates by about 25%.





with teen passengers at night or driving on winding roads in the rain. In general, new teen drivers should avoid situations that have too many new and taxing things to cope with at once.

### **WHICH HOURS SHOULD BE RESTRICTED?**

When determining what times teens should be restricted from driving, we need to consider the entire period of “darkness,” which changes depending on the season and where you live. Each time period below represents different levels of risk and different challenges to the family setting and maintaining nighttime restrictions.

**1 9 p.m. to Midnight:** The research evidence tells us that the majority of nighttime teen crashes occur before midnight. These hours should be the primary focus of a nighttime restriction in your Family’s Plan. We also know that this is the time period that may cause the most strain on a family’s schedule. Teens have evening study and social commitments, and this restriction adds to a family’s juggling act.

### **2 Midnight to 5 a.m. (Dawn):**

These hours are also a high-risk period. This late night and early morning period is when a teen driver would be most likely to be fatigued, make errors in judgment, and engage in risky driving behaviors. With possible exceptions for school or other special activities scheduled in the early a.m., restricting these hours is usually the least disruptive to family schedules.

**3 Early Evening:** The period between dusk and 9 p.m. is a difficult period to define, since darkness comes at different times during the year. It’s an active time of the day for a teen, a heavy traffic time, and a time when parents are glad to have an extra driver in the house. It’s also the time of day when the family’s schedule makes it hardest to spare an adult to accompany the teen. The challenge during this time period is to balance risk and convenience when granting privileges during these hours.

Because there are wide variations in family schedules, times when it gets dark, and the readiness

of different teen drivers, there is no “best” set of guidelines for every reader of this Guide. Take a look at the time periods above and weigh your choices. Determine the best ways to get the greatest safety benefits for your teen, while gradually allowing her to gain the necessary experience she needs to become a safe and independent nighttime driver.

### **EXEMPTIONS BASED UPON DESTINATION OR PURPOSE OF THE TRIP**

For a parent, sometimes there is a lot of pressure to lift nighttime restrictions, even for a one-time situation. It can be a tough call, especially when we know that the risks don’t change, no matter how badly the teen wants to go someplace or how careful she promises to be.

Case by case, take into account all the merits and dangers of the situation. Trust the facts laid out in this Guide and your instincts. Our advice can’t make the decision for your family; the parent’s best judgment of the teen’s readiness and the teen’s sense of responsibility must be weighed by you in making the final decision.

Many state laws allow exemptions for school, work, religious, and other activities. Common sense tells us that some trips probably have higher risks than others. But no one





The facts are startling: Mile for mile, 16- and 17-year-old drivers are about three times more likely to be involved in a fatal car crash at night than during the day.



really knows how much more or less risky it is for your teen to drive to work than to the game.

The time limitations in your state's law, if any, are a 'minimum' and should

not overrule a parent's understanding of the readiness of his teen, or decisions about the other risks, such as road and weather conditions, that the law cannot address. In your

Family's Plan, and in any special cases, acknowledge the risks of nighttime driving and balance the worthiness of the trip with the dangers that you know your teen driver faces. ▼

## ADVICE

*A nighttime restriction and a passenger restriction are different risk environments, but require similar solutions. While some of the Advice in each section will sound the same, there are important differences.*

- ✓ Start with your state's requirements. Parent and teen should be familiar with any regulations regarding driving at night: the hours of the day that are restricted, the period the restriction is in effect, and any exemptions your state law may include. Whatever the minimum imposed by law, we recommend you adopt the following best safety practices to make a nighttime restriction that fits your Family's Plan, and provides the greatest safety benefits for your teen driver.
- ✓ Begin your nighttime restriction after dark. First, include the hours that, mile for mile, expose your teen to the greatest risk: 9 p.m. to midnight, and midnight until dawn. Depending on your location and the season, the period between dusk and 9 p.m. should be considered.
- ✓ The restriction should be in effect for a period of the first six months after receiving a license, with an option to renew and extend, depending on when the parent thinks the teen is ready to take on the added risk of driving at night.
- ✓ Remember, any rule less strict than no unsupervised driving between 9 p.m. and 5 a.m. for the first six months comes with risk attached. There is no evidence that this risk is different if the destination is for work or a party.

## NIGHTTIME RESTRICTION

- ✓ Give the newly licensed driver frequent opportunities to drive at night — with a supervisor in the car. List by name the licensed drivers who can accompany the teen after dark. Make it clear: Not just any driver over 21 is okay. Some risk is associated with passengers up to the age of 29.
- ✓ Establish consequences for breaking your family's rules. Setting rules and establishing consequences increases compliance by novice teen drivers. A written agreement listing rules and consequences has been helpful for many families. (See "Setting Expectations — The Parent/Teen Agreement," page 49.)
- ✓ Parent and teen need to discuss the fact that the risk of nighttime driving isn't just when the teen is the driver, but also when the teen is a passenger in other teens' cars. Her exposure to this risk is even greater when she's riding with another teen, because it combines two high-risk conditions: driving at night, and driving with teen passengers. (See the box, A Message for Teens: Are You Safe as a Passenger? in the prior section, "A Passenger Restriction.")
- ✓ Your teen's friends may not be governed by the same rules. Give her all the support and encouragement you can to resist taking the risk of driving or being a passenger at night.



RISKS FROM CHOICES WE MAKE:

# UNSAFE DRIVING BEHAVIORS





## Now we're going to talk about risks that can be avoided completely because they are not situations, but choices a driver makes.

When any driver, but especially a teen, chooses to engage in risky driving behaviors, the odds of him being in a crash greatly increase. When combined with the already unavoidable risks that simply come with being a novice teen driver, the chance of a crash and the likely severity of a crash are both raised to extreme levels.

We've all heard about the dangers associated with some of the behaviors discussed in the following pages. These behaviors include drinking and driving, not wearing seat belts, speeding, and driving too fast for conditions. But the danger from these behaviors is so great and so universal, the facts bear repeating. Nowhere in this Guide will you find rules that are more straightforward or have a greater fundamental safety impact.

There are also other risky driving behaviors that we are now only beginning to fully understand. Scientists studying the impact of various stresses on drivers are beginning to document the roles that cell phone use, reckless driving, and fatigue play in increasing crash risk.

Adding one or more of these risks to the inherent risks of being a teen driver is high-stakes gambling on the road.

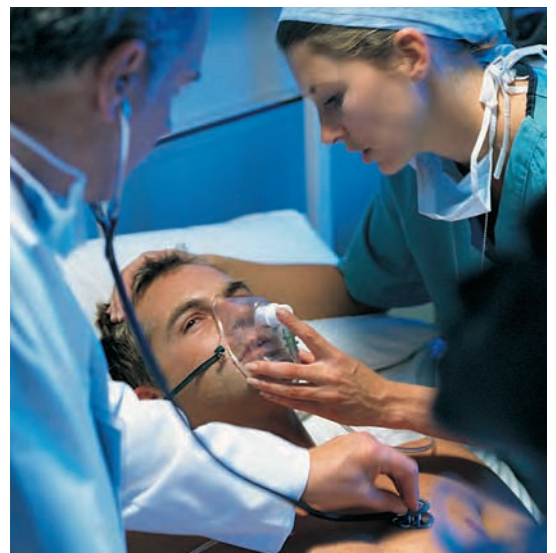
### HELP YOUR TEEN MAKE SMART CHOICES

We would all like to believe that the teen in our family is responsible. That he always buckles up and obeys the speed limit. That he certainly never drinks and drives. For too many parents, these can be tragic assumptions.

The research results on risky driving behaviors by teenagers are disturbing. Teens, who are at a

higher risk for crashes to begin with, wear their seat belts far less often than older drivers do. Speeding plays a role in over a third of all fatal crashes involving a teen driver. And far too many teen crashes are related to drinking, even though every state in the U.S. has a minimum drinking age of 21.

Teens are also especially vulnerable to distractions in the car, being drowsy, and driving recklessly. Novice teen drivers are at risk not only due to their inexperience as drivers, but also because of their inexperience with driving under duress, whether that's being tired, distracted, or even upset or angry. And reckless drivers are often convinced of the risk they're taking only after they've caused a crash. These are risk factors for all drivers, but teens in particular need to learn to first identify these behaviors and to then exercise their better judgment to avoid or correct them.







### **CONSEQUENCES FOR UNSAFE DRIVING**

Unsafe driving has many consequences. Make sure your teen realizes that in addition to the immediate consequences of a crash, such as injuries to people and damage to the car, there are also consequences imposed by society. These include tickets, fines, increased insurance rates, and lawsuits. Teens cannot hide any of these consequences from their parents. In almost every state, parents must be notified if a driver under the age of 18 is issued a moving violation. A ticket goes on the teen's permanent driving record, affecting insurance rates and, in some states, license status.

Then there are the consequences that your family establishes for unsafe driving. These consequences need to be applied consistently and be serious enough to match the severity and danger of the natural and social consequences of a crash. Take a look at the section, "Setting Expectations – The Parent/Teen Driving Agreement," on page 49, for a discussion of ways that you can clearly define safe driving practices and the consequences that will be imposed for any violations.

### **MAKE AVOIDING UNSAFE DRIVING BEHAVIORS PART OF YOUR FAMILY'S PLAN**

Be sure your teen understands the real dangers he puts himself and others in when he commits risky driving behaviors. A teen driver already has a greater chance of being in a crash, just by being a teen. When he then chooses to take risks, even if it is "just this once," the combination makes the situation considerably worse. The likelihood and severity of a crash go up disproportionately, and severe consequences are much more likely.

The best way to protect your teen from these dangers is to begin by setting clear expectations. Parents and teens should discuss the information in this section and establish some clear, unconditional rules about never committing these unsafe behaviors. Set expectations by outlining consequences for breaking any rules related to safe driving.

But a teen needs more than consequences to help him make the right decisions. Saying "no" to a ride from a friend who has been drinking, or making a pal wear his seat belt, are challenging situations for adults, let alone for teens. Teens need positive support, encouragement, and facts to strengthen their resolve to handle these tough situations. They need good role models in their parents, and thoughtful advice on how to deal with situations that can challenge friendships and cause hurt feelings.

Finally, parent and teen need to recognize that safe driving behaviors don't apply just to the novice teen driving experience. They're rules for life, for adults and teens alike. ▼



## SEAT BELTS: EVERY TRIP, EVERY OCCUPANT, EVERY TIME



Seat belts are the most effective safety device in your car. They take only a few seconds to buckle, will dramatically reduce the chance of injury or death for every occupant, and come already installed in every car.

Wearing a seat belt is like having a crash-survival insurance policy. But if you don't take those few seconds to buckle up, those seat belts are worthless. In a crash, you've lost any protection they could provide. Seat belts can determine who will walk away from a crash and who will not.

The science is straightforward. Even relatively low-speed crashes produce extremely violent crash forces that your body, if not restrained, will absorb in uncontrolled ways. Seat belts protect driver and passengers by distributing the force of impact more evenly, and keeping riders from hitting objects and other people in the car or being thrown from the vehicle.

As compelling as the scientific reasons for wearing a seat belt may be, a disturbing number of people, adults and teens alike, are needlessly injured or killed in crashes because someone in the car was unbuckled. Teens are the worst offenders for

driving or riding unbuckled, most often when no one is around to make sure that they comply. As a parent, you need to set a good example and always wear your seat belt. That's the first step. Then make sure your teen understands the stakes, develops good habits, and knows the consequences that you will impose if he breaks this unconditional rule.

### BUCKLE UP — FRONT AND BACK

Everybody in the car should wear a seat belt. Sitting in the back seat is no exception. When passengers don't wear their seat belts, wherever they're sitting, they're gambling not only with their own lives but everyone else's in the car. Unbelted people not only risk getting hurt themselves, but they can also be thrown into other passengers and cause serious injuries. No matter where you're sitting, wearing your seat belt protects both you and the others in the car. Even when

buckled, front seat passengers have a 20% higher risk of death when their backseat passenger is unbelted. (NHTSA)

### THE DRIVER IS THE "CAPTAIN OF HIS SHIP"

As the driver, it's your responsibility to be sure that everyone is properly buckled up. In many states with seat belt laws, the driver will be issued the tickets for unbelted passengers. Save yourself that trouble. No matter what your passenger's excuse may be, as the driver you are responsible.

On the next page, you'll find basic information on the proper seat restraint for different kinds of passengers, infants to adults. You should get to know this information and practice it.



### THE SCIENCE SAYS

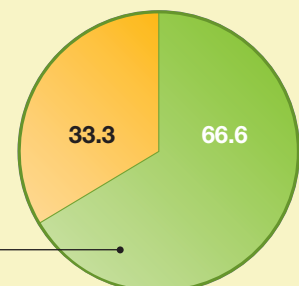
Lap and shoulder safety belts reduce the risk of fatal injury to vehicle occupants by 50%.

Source: NSC's Air Bag & Seat Belt Safety Campaign

Two Thirds of Teens Killed in Fatal Crashes Were NOT Wearing Seat Belts

Source: NHTSA — FARS 2003

NOT Wearing Seat Belts





## OCCUPANT PROTECTION

Courtesy of the National Safety Council's Air Bag & Seat Belt Safety Campaign

### SAFETY BELTS AND CAR SAFETY SEATS

If safety belts were medicine, we would consider them wonder drugs for the range of serious and fatal injuries they can prevent. Lap and shoulder belts provide excellent protection, but only if worn by the driver and every passenger every trip.

Safety belt systems are primarily designed to fit and protect adult occupants and older children. Therefore, age appropriate car safety seats are required for children under age 8 or 80 pounds. As we have all come to know, kids age 12 and under are best protected in properly installed age-appropriate restraints in the rear seat.

- Infants under 1 year old and until they are at least 20 pounds must be in a rear-facing infant seat properly installed in a rear seat.

- Toddlers over 1 year old and 20 pounds can be in a forward-facing seat properly installed in a rear seat. They can be kept rear-facing longer, if the size and weight limits of the safety seat allow.

- Children under age 8 and 4'9" should be in booster seats, again properly installed in a rear seat.

- Proper safety belt use means not putting the shoulder strap under the arm; putting feet on the floor, not on the dash; and not riding in the back of pickup trucks.

### AIR BAGS

- Both driver and passenger front air bags have been standard in most new passenger cars since 1993, and vans and light trucks since 1997.

- Side impact air bags and side curtain air bags are increasingly becoming standard equipment.

- Air bags are not a substitute for safety belts but rather offer important additional head and spine protection in combination with lap and shoulder belts, particularly in moderate to severe crashes.

- Kids 12 and under should not be in front of air bags, but rather, properly restrained in a rear seat.

- For people over 12 years old the best protection is the combination of belts and air bags.

Make it a rule, teen and adult drivers alike: The wheels do not roll until everyone is buckled up. Being the driver not only comes with the responsibility for making sure that everyone is buckled up, it also comes with the authority to enforce that rule. As the driver, you are the captain of your ship.

### CLICK IT OR TICKET

Here's an appeal to your wallet and your valuable time: Wear your belt or risk a ticket. "Click It or Ticket" is a national campaign to encourage people to wear their seat belts. It's one of the ways states have gotten tougher about seat belt use. Law enforcement officials are promoting efforts to increase compliance. In some states, roadside checkpoints are set up at least twice a year to look specifically for unbelted drivers and passengers. All drivers face fines for being unbuckled. In more and more states, unbuckled teen drivers can have their provisional driver's licenses revoked, or have their restriction period lengthened before they can obtain their independent driver status.

In an increasing number of states, drivers can be stopped and ticketed just because their seat belt isn't fastened. Save yourself the trouble. Next time you catch yourself making an excuse, take the time and buckle up. ▼







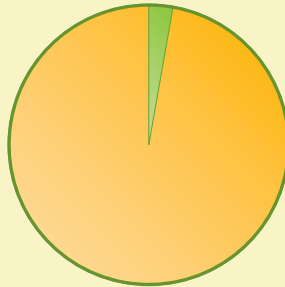
## THE SCIENCE SAYS

### The Effectiveness of Seat Belts:

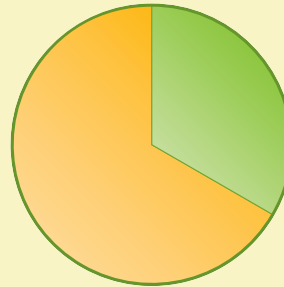
While rollovers account for only 3% of all passenger vehicle crashes – rollovers account for fully 1/3 of all passenger vehicle fatalities, and 72% of those fatalities were unbuckled!

Source: NHTSA

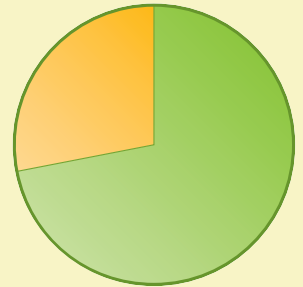
3% of Passenger Vehicle Crashes



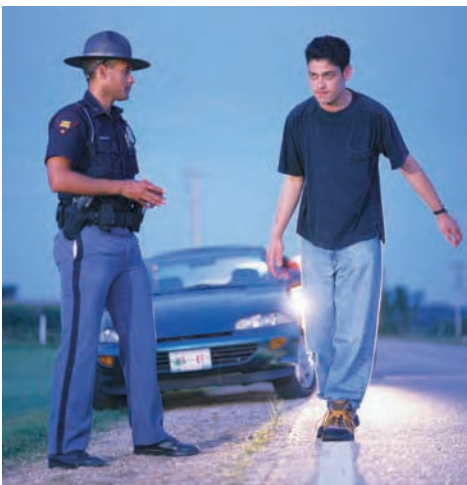
33% of Passenger Vehicle Fatalities



72% of Rollover Fatalities NOT Buckled



## NO ALCOHOL OR DRUGS



Teen drivers under the influence are extremely dangerous. When a teen drinks and drives, you've got an inexperienced driver who is also an inexperienced drinker behind the wheel. That's a bad combination, and a terrible gamble. We know that teen drivers are at a higher crash risk. Using alcohol or drugs and driving just increases that danger. Worse yet, when the driver accepts those odds, he is gambling not only for himself, but for everyone else around him both in and out of the vehicle. That's why in all 50 states there are zero tolerance laws for underage drinking and driving.

Driving under the influence is just as bad a risk for the passenger as it is for the driver. Getting into a car driven by someone who's impaired by drugs or alcohol puts you at the same crash risk as the driver. Smart teens understand this. They count on the facts and their better judgment to help them say "no" when they're offered a ride by someone who's used alcohol or drugs.

This information can be helpful if someone ever challenges your decision to make the right choice. This can be a tough situation, resulting in embarrassment, hurt feelings, and major changes in friendships. It can take courage and a lot of self-confidence to stand up for yourself and reduce a risk that is bad for everybody involved. The facts can be your friend in these situations. It helps when you know what you're talking about.

MADD, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, is just one of the organizations that can give you complete, solid facts about drinking and driving. They have answers to questions of special interest to teens and young adults. The Web site and mailing address for MADD are listed on page 64.

### COPS TAKE THIS SERIOUSLY; YOU SHOULD TOO

What about state law? We bet that every teen knows it's illegal for those under the age of 21 to drink alcohol. But, if you drink and drive, that underage law is just the beginning of your legal problems. If you're behind the wheel with alcohol in your blood, the legal consequences for driving violations skyrocket.

Penalties for driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs (DWI) have become a lot tougher over the past several years for all drivers. But for teen drivers, every state has zero-tolerance laws for underage drivers who drink. Results: driving permits cancelled; provisional licenses revoked; full licenses suspended.

No amount of alcohol, or so little that even a dose of cough syrup might put you over the legal limit, is the law. And "just being a high-spirited teenager" will not work as an excuse when a prosecutor charges you with anything from DWI to vehicular homicide.

Parents need to talk to their teens, set clear expectations and consequences, and model the behavior they expect: Drinking and driving, drugs and driving don't mix. ▼



Just a few of the things you'll learn from MADD...

**Don't be misled by myth or misconception – It's not true that ...**

- ... some people “can” drink and other people “can’t” – All drivers, all ages, all genders, all metabolisms, become impaired with very little alcohol intake.
- ... drinking coffee or taking a cold shower will “sober you up” and refresh your abilities to drive a car – No. The best it might do is make you a wide-awake impaired driver.
- ... drugs are a bigger problem than alcohol – Alcohol is a drug. And alcohol kills 6.5 times the number of people killed by cocaine, heroin, and every other illegal drug combined.
- ... you can drink a little bit and not be impaired – Alcohol, even a little bit of alcohol, impairs your ability to drive a car. Just a little can easily be too much. How much, you ask?

Do you know about BAC (Blood Alcohol Concentration)? You should learn more: visit MADD at: [www.MADD.org](http://www.MADD.org)

## NO SPEEDING



The speed you are driving determines the force of impact if you crash. The faster you go, the harder you will hit and the worse the damage to property and persons. Your speed can also cause a crash you could have avoided if you'd been going more slowly. When you increase the speed of the car you're driving, you reduce the time and distance you have to react, making crashes more likely.

Teen drivers are especially likely to need extra stopping distance and reaction time. Crash data show that when teen drivers react to avoid a crash, they often overcorrect. This tendency decreases as the teen gains experience and practice behind the wheel. It's ironic, but while most teens' physical reflexes and eyesight are sharper than adults', their responses in possible crash situations tend to be less reliable than adults'.

## SLOW DOWN

Going fast is a thrill that most of us know from coasting a bike down a steep hill, riding a roller coaster, skate boarding, skiing, or many other activities. We humans have developed some creative ways to get our speed fix. But speeding in a car is not at all like speeding in a roller coaster. Roller coasters run in a controlled environment that allows people to enjoy going fast, while minimizing the incredible danger that comes with it.

Teens are bombarded by messages that pushing the pedal to the metal is the ultimate risk-free thrill. These messages are found everywhere from advertisements to car chases in movies and video games. We face a tough challenge to convince our novice drivers to slow down, when so much of our society seems to say otherwise.



### THE SCIENCE SAYS

**Among 15-20 year old drivers in fatal crashes in 2006, 31% of the drivers killed had been drinking.**

*Source: NHTSA*

**Teenage drivers with BACs in the 0.05-0.08% range are far more likely than sober teenage drivers to be killed in crashes – 17 times more likely for males, 7 times more likely for females.**

**At BACs of 0.08-0.10%, risks are even higher, 52 times for males, 15 times for females.**

*Source: Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (June 2003)*



The value of “getting there first” is another message we hear in our culture. For teens, especially when their natural competitive instincts kick in while driving, the risk level goes through the roof. We need to make sure that our teens understand that “getting there safely” is the first priority.

We speed, knowing we’re increasing our crash risk, even though our real priority is to get to where we’re going without a crash or speeding ticket. No driver should use the gas pedal to make up for errors in planning.

## SPEED LIMITS — LAWS TO LIVE WITH

Speed limits are set, first of all, for safety reasons. These limits are not arbitrary. They are based on calculations about what speed is usually safe under a variety of conditions for a particular road or highway.

At times, the posted speed is higher than the safe speed. We all know you should go slower than the speed limit in rain, ice, or snow. But there are also other times when traveling too fast for conditions has nothing to do with the weather. When passing a school that has just let out, or a busy playground on a narrow street with cars parked on either side, anything faster than a crawl is handing your responsibility for being a safe driver over to a third-grader chasing a ball into the street.

Police officers have seen the effects of speed, first-hand. They’re interested in preventing those crashes before they happen, so they’re watching out for the teen who confuses the drive home from school with a race to the finish.

And tickets get issued for “driving too fast for conditions,” not just faster than the posted limit. Limiting your speed is a way to limit both your risk of crashing and the severity of a crash. Make driving at a safe speed one of the first rules for your teen driver. ▼

## DON'T DRIVE DISTRACTED



Distractions bring substantial crash risk for all drivers. For new teen drivers, distractions are even more dangerous. One of the highest-risk driving situations for teens is having other teens in the car. But even when driving solo, a teen who is talking on his or her cell phone, text messaging, eating or changing the music is not concentrating completely on traffic, increasing the chance for error.

Even experienced drivers can face “distraction overload.” And while the brain may want to shut out factors that interrupt our concentration, sometimes the distractions remain. Not all of these interruptions are created equal, either.

## CELL PHONES — FOUR DISTRACTIONS IN ONE

Cell phones combine all four types of distractions — manual, auditory, visual and cognitive — into one dangerous and often deadly result. In fact, the likelihood of a crash increases fourfold when talking on a cell phone while driving. This is true for both handheld and hands-free devices.

Driving ability is impaired whether the driver consciously realizes it or not. Scientists have taken MRI pictures of the brain to literally see how cell phone use affects cognitive

distraction and driving. They found a 37% decrease in an area of the brain used for driving when people are listening to sentences. Drivers talking on cell phones can have reaction times slower than drunk drivers at 0.08 BAC level.

That’s why state and local governments are passing laws to prohibit teen drivers from talking and text messaging on any wireless device while driving. Laws covering adult drivers typically include hand-held phones only, requiring them to use a headset or mounted phone system for hands-free calling. While that eliminates the manual part of the distraction, it does not address the visual, auditory or cognitive aspects. In any call, hands-free or not, the driver must divide his attention between the call and the road.

## DISTRACTIONS COME IN FOUR BASIC FLAVORS:

**manual** (using your hands),  
**auditory** (using your ears),  
**visual** (using your eyes), and  
**cognitive** (distractions to thought and concentration).



## THE SCIENCE SAYS

### Percent of Teen Driver Fatalities Involving Speeding

More than a third of teen driver fatalities involve speeding.

Source: NHTSA (2002)



**When a car travels just ten miles faster, from 55 to 65 mph, crash forces go up 40%.**

Source: National Safety Council (NSC)



**Driver distraction contributes to 80% of crashes and 65% of near crashes.**

Source: Virginia Tech Transportation Institute (2006)



### TEENS AND TEXT MESSAGING

This is especially true of texting, which teens tend to do more than older generations when they are behind the wheel. Nearly 40% of young drivers surveyed said they sent and received text messages while driving. In addition to text messaging, phones are quickly evolving into devices that have e-mail, Internet access and video capabilities. These added distractions are used anywhere by teens, including on the road. Teens are the most inexperienced drivers and also the group most likely to use their cell phone while driving, however. Therefore, family conversations and Parent/Teen Agreements should include prohibiting all use of wireless devices while driving. ▼

### Hands-Free is Not Risk-Free:

**“The biggest distraction of cell calls is the diminished mental capacity. If hands-free devices encourage drivers to have more or longer conversations, then we might be worse off.”**

J. Peter Kissinger, President, AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety



## STAY ALERT — A CAUTION ABOUT DROWSY DRIVING

Families with teens know that teens require more sleep than adults do. Their metabolisms need it and their intense schedules demand it. As with other risk factors discussed in this Guide, teens often don't recognize the warning signs for being too drowsy to drive, and may even discount them when they do. Teen drivers need sleep for more than just their general health. Lack of sleep poses a serious crash risk for teens.

Crashes that result from the driver falling asleep at the wheel tend to be more serious. Often the driver does not awaken in time to slow down or take corrective action. Plus, drowsy-driving crashes usually occur on high-speed roads and highways.

Any combinations of risks will rapidly multiply dangers. The presence of alcohol in the system of an already drowsy driver, or just driving at night and getting sleepy, will greatly escalate the chances of crashing. Combining risk factors, especially when the driver is a teen, stack the odds sharply against him.

Of course, the best way to avoid drowsy driving is to get enough rest in the first place. But, here are some ideas to consider before you find yourself falling asleep at the wheel:

### IF YOU'RE NOT FAR FROM YOUR DESTINATION, ARE YOU IN A PLACE WHERE YOU CAN SAFELY:

- Get a cup of coffee or a soda with caffeine?
- Walk around a bit to 'get your blood moving' before you drive? or take a 15-minute 'power nap'?
- If you are in a place where those things aren't possible or aren't safe, consider what else might help you: loud music? fresh air?
- Remember, studies show that short naps, coffee, and driving with the windows open and the radio loud are only good for a brief time before the driver begins to fall asleep again.
- Think ahead. Before your trip, consider your options. ▼



### THE SCIENCE SAYS

**“Every year, falling asleep while driving is responsible for at least 100,000 automobile crashes, 40,000 injuries, and 1,550 fatalities.”**

Source: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration Web site



## STAY COOL – NO RECKLESS DRIVING

Cutting other cars off, weaving in and out of traffic, following too closely, and boxing other drivers in – we all know reckless driving when we see it. Whether motivated by emotion, running late, or plain bad driving habits, reckless driving causes crashes.

Treating the road like a racetrack is high-risk gambling. This kind of “aggressive driving” usually starts with a sense of being immune to risk, and is often fueled by strong emotion. But reckless driving can be a product of any number of different emotions. It could be anger, or it could be the joy of being out on your own, windows rolled down, and radio cranked up.

Whatever the source, it’s all the same to others on the highway. We see drivers speeding along, changing lanes too quickly and with no margin for error, and we hope their over-confidence doesn’t cause a crash. Always get out of the way of reckless drivers. Let them pass you by, and say “good luck to you” as they go. Don’t let them spark a reckless, emotional driving response from you.

Whatever your feelings are when behind the wheel, don’t let them affect the way you drive. Do not use your car as an outlet for emotions. Whether it be joy, anger, or indignation, any strong emotion should stay off the road. ▼

## ADVICE

### UNSAFE DRIVING BEHAVIORS

*Unsafe driving behaviors involve choices the driver makes, and the exercise of judgment. Here, in addition to the risks a teen faces simply by being a novice teen driver, are the risks that push the odds to “extremely high.” Make sure that the teen understands that breaking these rules comes not only with the natural consequences on the road and those imposed by law enforcement, but also those consequences the parent creates.*

- ✓ Set firm rules for the teen. No excuses. Zero-tolerance.
- ✓ Wear a seat belt – every trip – everyone in the car – every time. The driver always has the responsibility and authority for making sure everyone in the car is correctly buckled-up. This family rule applies even when a teen is a passenger in another car.
- ✓ No driving if he’s had any alcohol or taken drugs. No riding with any driver who he thinks may have had alcohol or taken drugs.
- ✓ Obey speed limits. That means driving at the speed that’s safe for conditions, and never faster than the posted speed limit.

- ✓ Minimize distractions. Don’t use cell phones when driving.
- ✓ Stay off the road if he’s over-tired or emotional.
- ✓ Encourage the teen to call home if he’s in trouble. Make it a policy that getting home safely comes first. Be prepared to make good on that by offering to pick him up, call a taxi, etc.
- ✓ Let the teen know everyone’s first concern – before embarrassment, possible punishment, or any other consequence – must be staying out of any car where the crash risk has been escalated.
- ✓ Setting clear rules and establishing consequences increases compliance by novice teen drivers. A written agreement listing rules and consequences has helped many families. Please see “Setting Expectations – The Parent/Teen Agreement,” page 49.





# PROMOTING COMPLIANCE WITH **PRIVILEGES** AND CONSEQUENCES



## This is the “how-to” portion of this Guide. In this section, we will discuss a valuable tool for your Family’s Plan: a Parent/Teen Agreement for driving safety.

**T**he majority of this Guide so far has concentrated on presenting and explaining the scientific evidence about the special risks that teens face behind the wheel. These include those that simply come with being a teen driver (age and driving inexperience); those that relate to certain driving situations (driving with teen passengers or at night); and those that are the result of risk-taking behaviors (drinking and driving, not wearing a seat belt, speeding, and others).

We have emphasized the need for parental involvement throughout the teen driving experience, and the critical role of restrictions in increasing the safety benefits for teen drivers in the first six to 12 months after getting a license. Now, the question is, how well will your family’s teen comply with all the things included in the graduated approach to teen driving? The natural consequences of a crash, which include inconvenience, property damage, injuries, or worse, are strong motivators for driving safely. But there are also other consequences, such as those that

society imposes when a law is broken, and those that a parent imposes when a family rule is broken. All of these play major roles in encouraging a teen’s compliance with safe driving practices.

There may be no better example of a parent actively managing the teen’s driving experience than the Parent/Teen Agreement.

From the start, we’ve underscored the need to set expectations teen and parent both acknowledge. With a written agreement about driving safety, parent and teen work together to discuss different types of risks, set parameters for increasing driving privileges gradually, and define consequences for violating any expectations. Both have a guideline. The parent sees a plan for minimizing risk, and the teen sees a road map for earning driving independence.

### **KEEP THE BIG PICTURE IN MIND**

Parents and teens need to discuss not only family rules related to driving, but also issues related to state laws, law enforcement, and insurance issues. In the next section, “The Effect of Your





State Law,” we talk about the need for your family to determine whether the regulations in your state are sufficient to increase the safety of your teen driver during this high-risk time.

Afterwards, the section “Advice from a Cop” gives the outlook from law enforcement on teen driving.

Law enforcement plays a vital role in protecting the teen driver by encouraging compliance and intervening in situations before they become crashes. This section is from a Chief of Police, who is also a father of four, and has had years of personal and professional experience dealing with teen drivers.

The last section in this Guide discusses insurance costs.

This presents a financial motive for

teens and parents together to find ways to avoid crashes.

Comprehensive GDL laws are successful at reducing teen crash rates because they limit the teen’s exposure to risks while the teen gradually gains driving experience. These risks include those that are inherent in being a new, inexperienced teen driver; those that are related to specific driving conditions; and those that result from risk-taking behaviors. Parent/teen driving agreements, state laws, law enforcement, and the insurance community all support GDL by promoting compliance with the known “best practices” for reducing teen crash risk.

Make sure the effort you’ve invested in your teen’s driving experience pays off now by structuring driving privileges in a way that keeps your teen’s safety clearly the top priority. We all want the same thing: a teen driver who has been crash-free and violation-free for months after getting a license, has had her restrictions lifted gradually over that time, and is now ready for full driving independence. ▼





# SETTING EXPECTATIONS – THE PARENT/TEEN AGREEMENT



**T**he graduated approach to the teen driving process is most successful when a parent is fully involved. Throughout this Guide, we have encouraged parents not to stand by and just let the teen’s driving experience happen, but instead, make the commitment to work closely with the teen and manage the driving experience.

We’ve talked about the parent actively participating in the entire two-year process of teen driving. It starts with the teen getting a learner’s permit and continues for hours and months of parent-supervised practice driving. Then, when the teen gets a driver’s license, whether it is a “Provisional License” or a full-privilege license, the time investment by the parent in supervising, observing, and monitoring teen driving continues through the first six to 12 months and 1,000 miles so critical to teen driver safety.

Being fully involved also means setting the teen’s expectations throughout this time by making plans for each stage of learning to drive: novice (apprentice), intermediate (provisional), and independent driver. These plans are what define your Family’s Plan.

Now we have reached the culmination of all the information and advice in this Guide. This is where it all comes together. The Parent/Teen Agreement is an effective tool for managing your teen’s driving experience during the “provisional” phase, and a critical part of your Family’s Plan.

## WHY USE A PARENT/TEEN AGREEMENT?

The Agreement is a written document that defines restrictions, privileges, rules, and consequences. It’s a reference as well as a commitment to safety. The parent can use it to set parameters that will reduce the risks your teen faces during the first six to 12



months of solo driving experience. The teen can use it to chart his progress toward full driver independence.

Because a written agreement sets expectations clearly from the start, it makes it harder for either party to “forget” or bend the rules. It’s a big help when the inevitable

request for an exception arises. When an exception is granted, a written agreement helps ensure that it stays an exception and doesn’t become the new rule. All in all, parent-teen communication is stronger using an agreement because everyone is “singing from the same sheet of music.”

## WHAT SHOULD A PARENT/TEEN AGREEMENT INCLUDE?

Most parents want their teens to follow a host of different guidelines for using the car... The list probably includes maintenance procedures: financial issues, personal safety, and ways to manage a car as a shared resource in the family. While parents may be tempted to create a laundry list of “do’s and don’ts” for the teen, we recommend you keep these issues separate and focus first on driving safety.

Driving safety is the foundation for most car-related issues, including the driver’s personal safety, shared use of the car, and protection of property. The restrictions you impose and the privileges you grant a teen that relate to when, where, and under what circumstances she drives, are designed to prevent a crash. These restrictions and privileges should be given the highest priority. They deserve their own agreement.

The contract should be simple for a number of reasons. That makes it easy to fill out and easy to understand. A quick glance, and both teen and parent can see what the current privileges are, and when the driver is eligible for new ones.

## HERE’S AN EXAMPLE

We have included an example of a Parent/Teen Driving Agreement. It is an agreement used in the Checkpoints program, a research project jointly administered by the National Institute of Child Health and Development and the Preusser Research Group, Inc. We are grateful for their permission to include this example in the Family Guide.

But the Checkpoints example is only one of many Parent/Teen Agreements that are available from public and private teen driver safety programs. You can find other examples by following the resources listed on page 65.

## MESSAGE TO TEENS

**Every time you get behind the wheel, you make the decision whether or not you’re going to stick to your end of the bargain in the Parent/Teen Driving Agreement, or if you’re going to ignore what you know about driving safely. We hope you value your family’s trust enough to keep it. Here are a few reasons why it’s not worth it to play the odds you won’t get caught.**

## WHY SHOULD I DO THIS?

**1 Because the best way to avoid tickets, expensive car repairs, increases in car insurance, injuries to you and others both inside and out of the car, loss of driving privileges, maybe even a loss of license – is to follow the Agreement. This actually can make your life easier.**

**2 It’s the quickest way to get full driving privileges. Break the Agreement, and it will take longer.**

**3 The best way you can prove you’re ready for new privileges is to show your parents you can handle the ones you’ve been given. That means not pushing the rules and trying to get privileges you haven’t earned.**

**4 Because it’s for a really short portion of you life – and it’s especially worth it when you consider the possible alternatives.**

**We know it can be frustrating, when you’ve been driving for a while and NOTHING has happened – but you have to remember you’re still in the danger zone, simply due to your age and inexperience as a driver. Lots can go right for a long time, and then in an instant you can be called upon to make judgments and reactions that go way beyond your basic driving skills. Keeping those possible situations to a minimum, until you’ve had more experience and time behind the wheel, is what driving restrictions are all about.**





# Parent/Teen Driving Agreement

## Part 1 » DRIVING CONDITIONS

### DIRECTIONS

- 1 In the table below, complete one checkpoint at a time. Start with Checkpoint 1. Discuss and assign Unsupervised Driving Privileges for Checkpoint 1. Use the recommendations or write in your own.
- 2 Decide how long Checkpoint 1 privileges should remain in effect. Use the recommendation or select your own time period. Based on the length of time you agree on, write in the date to review teen progress.
- 3 Fill in the “refrigerator magnet” and post it where it will be an easy reminder.
- 4 On the review date, consider moving to the next Checkpoint if teen passed the Quick Check:

- If teen progress is not satisfactory, set another review date for the current Checkpoint.
- If teen progress is satisfactory, discuss and assign Unsupervised Driving Privileges for the next Checkpoint. Then decide on the time period and write in the review date. Continue until you have completed all four Checkpoints.

### QUICK CHECK. DID TEEN...

- ☒ Follow unsupervised driving privileges?
- ☒ Have enough supervised driving practice?
- ☒ Advance in driving skills and judgment?
- ☒ Obey traffic laws?
- ☒ “Check in” with parent before each driving event?
- ☒ Take no unnecessary risks?
- ☒ Rarely lose driving privileges?

## » UNSUPERVISED DRIVING PRIVILEGES

PRIVILEGES		Checkpoint 1	Checkpoint 2	Checkpoint 3	Checkpoint 4
NIGHTTIME		Sundown or 9 pm	10 pm	11 pm	Midnight
TEEN PASSENGERS	Daytime	None	1, sometimes	1	2, sometimes
	Nighttime		none	1, sometimes	1
WEATHER	Daytime	Dry	Dry, light rain	Moderate	Most
	Nighttime		Dry	Dry, light rain	Moderate
ROAD TYPES	Daytime	Neighborhood	Local	All but highways	Most
	Nighttime		Neighborhood	Local	All but highways
RECOMMENDED TIME IN EFFECT		FIRST 1-3 MONTHS AFTER LICENSURE	NEXT 1-3 MONTHS	NEXT 3-6 MONTHS	NEXT 3-6 MONTHS
NEXT REVIEW DATE					



# Parent/Teen Driving Agreement

## Part 2 >> DRIVING RULES AND CONSEQUENCES

### DIRECTIONS

- 1 Read, discuss, and put into effect each rule.
- 2 Discuss the EXAMPLE VIOLATIONS and write in possible CONSEQUENCES.
- 3 Sign and date at the bottom to confirm your agreement and commitment.

### RULE 1: CHECK IN WITH A PARENT EVERY TIME YOU DRIVE.

- ☒ Tell a parent where you are going, who will be the passengers, and when you will return.
- ☒ Call home if you will be more than \_\_\_\_\_ minutes late.
- ☒ Call home if your plans change while you are out.
- ☒ Call home if you cannot get home safely. Parent will arrange a safe ride home.

### RULE 2: OBEY ALL TRAFFIC LAWS AND SIGNS.

- ☒ Never use alcohol or other drugs and drive.
- ☒ Never ride with a person who is driving after using alcohol or other drugs.
- ☒ Never ride in a car where any alcohol or drug use is occurring.
- ☒ Always wear your seat belt at all times as a driver or passenger.
- ☒ Always have every passenger wear a seat belt.
- ☒ Do not drive aggressively (e.g., speeding, tailgating, or cutting others off).

### RULE 3: DO NOT TAKE UNNECESSARY RISKS WHILE DRIVING.

- ☒ No playing around with passengers, messing around with the radio, talking on a cell phone, etc.
- ☒ Do not drive when overly tired, angry, or upset.
- ☒ Do not put yourself or others at increased risk by making unnecessary trips in adverse weather.

Example Violations	Consequences
TEEN USED ALCOHOL OR OTHER DRUGS AND DROVE.	<input type="checkbox"/> Lose driving privileges for _____ months/years. <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER: _____
TEEN GOT A TICKET FOR SPEEDING.	<input type="checkbox"/> Lose driving privileges for _____ weeks/months. <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER: _____
TEEN DIDN'T MAKE ALL PASSENGERS WEAR SEAT BELTS.	<input type="checkbox"/> Lose driving privileges for _____ weeks/months. <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER: _____
TEEN LIED ABOUT WHERE S/HE WAS GOING WITH THE CAR.	<input type="checkbox"/> Lose driving privileges for _____ weeks/months. <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER: _____
TEEN CAME HOME 45 MINUTES LATE WITHOUT CALLING.	<input type="checkbox"/> Lose driving privileges for _____ weeks/months. <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER: _____
TEEN VIOLATED THE AGREED-UPON PASSENGER RESTRICTION.	<input type="checkbox"/> Lose driving privileges for _____ weeks/months. <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER: _____
TEEN VIOLATED THE AGREED-UPON NIGHTTIME RESTRICTION.	<input type="checkbox"/> Lose driving privileges for _____ weeks/months. <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER: _____



**AGREE:** *We understand and agree to these driving conditions and rules.*

Parent(s) initials: \_\_\_\_\_ Teen initials: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_





When you sit down with your teen, have it clear in your mind what your starting point is for the number of teen passengers permitted, over what time period; hours she's restricted from driving at night, lasting what number of months; and what types of roads and environments she may travel during this period. Think about each of these risk factors not only alone, but in combination. If you allow two teen passengers and the night driving restriction begins as late as midnight, with no restrictions as to road type or weather, you're letting the teen party with his friends on the highway until twelve. There will be a time when she's experienced and mature enough to drive two friends home after dark on the highway, but we strongly suggest that won't be until she's been driving solo at least six to nine months.

## TYPES OF RESTRICTIONS

As you consider what to include in your Parent/Teen Agreement that will balance your teen's driving privileges with ways to increase teen driver safety, make sure you include the different types of restrictions.

### 1 TEMPORARY RESTRICTIONS

Temporary restrictions address the primary teen risks of driving with teen passengers and driving at night. Temporary restrictions are the critical protections that reduce a teen's exposure to both risk-taking behaviors and the inherent dangers she faces simply because she is a novice teen driver. But it's important to view Temporary Restrictions as temporary. They should be

lifted gradually as the teen gains experience in less risky environments. (See the sections "A Passenger Restriction" and "A Nighttime Restriction.")

Although both teen and parent can be frustrated by a delay in full driver independence, keep in mind that this is for the teen's safety and only for a matter of months. If you use a Parent/Teen Agreement, you can see the progress clearly on a timetable. Remember, granting driving privileges all at once is part of what causes high teen crash rates. By gradually expanding privileges over time, your family is protecting your teen from the highest-risk scenarios, while she gains the experience and maturity to effectively negotiate driving in those situations.

### 2 UNCONDITIONAL RULES

Unconditional rules are related to the unsafe driving behaviors people can choose to avoid. These are non-negotiable, lifetime rules for all drivers. (See the section "Risks from Unsafe Driving Behaviors.")

Your family's teen driver needs to realize that the choices she makes affect her life and those of the people around her. Writing down these rules serves as a reminder of their importance. Any violations should result in serious consequences, such as loss of privileges or delays in earning new privileges. Drinking and driving, not wearing a seat belt, and driving too fast are all unsafe driving behaviors that carry extremely high risks, so they should generate the toughest responses. Make it clear, both in writing and in the teen's

mind, that the consequences for breaking these rules are certain and severe.

### 3 TRIP CONDITIONS

Trip conditions are the "Who/What/When/Where/Why" of each driving trip, as well as the guidelines for what the teen should do if plans change while out with the car. The teen should provide this information every time she wants to take the car. With that information, the parent can determine the risks and the "worthiness" of each trip.

Trip conditions are the most often exercised set of driving parameters. The requirements can vary depending on the situation, but the information is important. It gives the parent the power to grant use of the car or exceptions to rules, as well as to veto trips that are not safe or are perhaps unnecessary. For example, although your teen has been looking forward to a certain trip and you were inclined to approve it, you have to veto it because the weather report now predicts rain. Or your teen does not have the privilege of driving passengers at night yet, but tonight is a special event so you make an exception.

### SETTING CONSEQUENCES

Parent and teen need to sit down and talk about what will happen if your teen driver violates privileges or restrictions. Use specific examples and specific results. Some parents hate having to play the "bad cop," especially when the consequences, such as revoking driving privileges, affect them almost as much



as the teen! Teen and parent should both remember this is a critical, but brief, time; and that everyone involved wants to safely move the teen from novice driver to crash-free and violation-free independent driver.

### EASING RESTRICTIONS AND GRANTING PRIVILEGES

If after the initial high-risk six- to 12-month period has passed, both parent and teen have become more comfortable with the teen's driving abilities, and the teen has been crash-free and violation-free during this time, it will be clear that she is ready to gain more driving independence.

Be careful not to lift restrictions too soon. The teen should show responsible behavior, safe driving practices, and be crash-free and violation-free for several months before she is given a new set of privileges.

Teens will ask for, and should earn, exemptions from driving restrictions every once in a while. But be sure that an exception remains an exception, not a revision of the rules. Good communication is just as critical now as ever. It can be easy to allow a series of "special circumstances" that become the new rule by default.

Also, don't grant too many privileges at one time. Combinations of privileges, such as driving several teen passengers at night, are the most dangerous for your teen driver. So, start slowly. For instance, allow one passenger while preserving the restriction against night driving. Don't allow the first independent nighttime driving experience with friends to occur on the night of a big game or prom when the temptation to indulge in other risky driving behaviors (rowdy passengers, cell-phone use, alcohol, speeding, etc.) is

greatest. Instead, the first experience should be related to a regular routine, such as taking a sibling to a regular activity during the week.

Once everyone is comfortable with a new level of teen driver responsibility, open the window a little further and grant greater privileges. For example, increase privileges to allow unlimited destinations with one or two passengers during the day. Or, add one night a week to the teen's regular driving times.

The key to granting driving privileges is to break down the parts of the restrictions and ease the teen into them one at a time. It may feel painfully slow to the teen, but like the tortoise and the hare, the tortoise comes out ahead. ▼

## ADVICE

### THE PARENT/TEEN AGREEMENT

*First, find a Parent/Teen Agreement example you'd like to use. There are a lot of different driving agreements out there. They are available from many places including state licensing departments and private and public organizations. So, find one that your family likes and will use. You can use the template that we provide or one from your DMV, or you can go to page 64 for a list of references for others.*

- ✓ **Decide on the different components of your Parent/Teen Agreement based on a combination of your state's laws, our recommendations, and your choices for ways to increase your teen's safety. (For a complete list of our recommended guidelines for the entire teen driving process, see the following section, "The Effect of Your State Law," on page 55.)**

- ✓ **We recommend you include these components:**

- 1 Temporary Restrictions on driving with teen passengers and driving at night that will be lifted gradually as the teen gains experience.**
- 2 Unconditional Rules for unsafe driving behaviors that your teen should choose to avoid that represent non-negotiable, lifetime rules for all drivers.**

- 3 Trip Conditions for the "Who/What/When/Where/Why" that a parent requires of each trip, including guidelines on what a teen should do if her plans change while out with the car.**

- 4 Consequences that will occur for violations of any of the above.**

- ✓ **Lift restrictions and grant driving privileges slowly over time while your teen gains valuable driving experience.**
- ✓ **Don't lift temporary restrictions on driving with teen passengers or driving at night too soon.**
- ✓ **Also, don't grant too many privileges at once. Combinations of privileges, such as driving with teen passengers and at night, put teenagers at very high risk for crash.**
- ✓ **When the initial high-risk six- to 12-month period has passed and your teen has proven to be crash-free and violation-free during that time, start granting new privileges one at a time.**



# THE EFFECT OF YOUR STATE LAW

**N**early all states have adopted some form of Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL). These laws vary widely from state to state, but those states with the most comprehensive provisional licensing systems, including temporary restrictions, are the ones that have seen reductions in teen crashes of up to 40%. Lawmakers have seen these results, and passed laws which extend driving practice for novice teen drivers; restrict access to high-risk situations, such as driving with teen passengers and driving at night; and gradually introduce teens to increasingly complex driving situations over time.

While these GDL requirements may give good baseline protection, the full measure of safety for a novice teen driver depends on the parent's attention and management. Parental involvement complements GDL by supporting the teen's compliance with the law, and enhances it by providing the parents' unique perspective on their teen's true readiness to drive.

Even the best law may not meet your family's unique needs. Laws are designed to address a broad range of circumstances for a large number of individuals. They are a product of compromise between competing interests. So, don't just assume that the state's requirements are the safest possible practices for your family. Put

together what we know from research, common sense, and knowledge of your own teen driver and ask, "Is state law enough?"

## YOU KNOW YOUR TEEN BEST

When your state law follows the best safety practices, it can make it easier for you to create your Family's Plan for managing your teen driver's experience. When your state's GDL requirements meet your standards for your family's safety, then you can feel comfortable applying them without having to add restrictions or time for your teen. It's harder to enforce additional restrictions, particularly when your teen has to live with rules his friends may not have to follow.

But anything less than the best safety practices recommended in this Guide comes with a steep increase in crash risks. And the consequences do not just affect your teen driver, but passengers and others on the road. You may need to create added restrictions and timelines in your Family's Plan to help increase the safety of your teen driver.

In the end, no one, including the state or law enforcement, will affect a teen's safety as much as the teen's parents. Parents must be involved. The decisions must come from the parents' judgment of when their teen is ready to move on to each new step and privilege in the

driving process. No matter what your state law requires, your teen will greatly benefit from your family's management of this process.

## IS YOUR STATE LAW ENOUGH?

To answer this question, parents and teen together should take a look at your state's driver licensing laws. You can get them from your state's DMV, either on their Web site or by contacting their local office.

Throughout this Guide, we've noted several points in the process of your teen's driving experience where you should pay special attention to your state's laws. The following is a complete list, with references to the section(s) where they're discussed at length:

## COMPARE YOUR STATE'S LAWS WITH OUR RECOMMENDATIONS:

**At what age will the state allow your teen to get his learner's permit?**

We recommend: No sooner than age 16. (See page 13, "The Learning Phase.")

**Does your state require your teen to take Driver Education?**

If not, decide how your teen will learn the rules of the road and basic driving skills that Driver Ed teaches. (For a discussion of your options, see page 16, "The Role of Driver Education.")



If so, find out what the Driver Ed course your teen is enrolled in teaches and if it encourages parental involvement and extended practice driving hours. (See page 16, “The Role of Driver Education.”)

We recommend: Either way, look for additional resources to enhance your teen’s learning process. Driver Education teaches many critical driving skills, but research shows it doesn’t make teens safer drivers. (See page 16, “The Role of Driver Education.”)

### Does your state grant a “time discount” for taking Driver Ed?

We recommend: Do not allow your teen to move on to the next step in the process earlier (meaning with less practice time in terms of months) just because he took Driver Ed. Research shows that “time discounts” actually increase the teen’s crash risk. (See page 16, “The Role of Driver Education.”)

### How many hours of practice driving does the state require?

We recommend: A minimum of 50 hours of practice to be logged over at least a 9- to 12-month period. (See page 19, “Learning to Drive and Supervised Practice.”)

### How many months of practice driving does the state require?

We recommend: A minimum of 9 to 12 months with a minimum of 50 hours of practice. (See page 19, “Learning to Drive and Supervised Practice.”)

### At what age should your teen be allowed to get his driver’s license?

We recommend: When the parent believes the teen is ready. As we discuss in the section “The Permit Phase,” delaying a teen’s start date has the benefit of reducing his exposure to risk while allowing time for additional maturity. But experience is also necessary to build safe driving habits. Not all teens are the same. The parents’ unique knowledge of their teen is the best deciding factor.

### Does your state have a restriction on driving with teen passengers? Is it over a long enough period to protect your teen? Does it have an exemption for siblings?

We recommend: A passenger restriction for at least the first six months of independent driving, with an option to extend, depending on when the parent thinks the teen will be ready to take on the added risk of passengers.

Remember, any rule less strict than zero passengers for the first six months comes with risk attached. There is no evidence that the risk is less for different people, such as friends and siblings. (See page 27, “A Passenger Restriction.”)

### Does your state have a restriction on driving at night? Does it address the critical crash period between 9 p.m. and midnight? Does it have an exemption for some destinations?

We recommend: A nighttime restriction in effect from after dark until dawn for at least the first six months of independent driving, with an option to extend, depending on when the parent thinks the teen will be ready to take on the added risk of driving at night.

Remember, exceptions come with risk attached. You may decide to grant some exceptions now and then for certain occasions. There is no evidence that the risk is less for work, religious activities, or other ‘worthy’ destinations. (See page 32, “A Nighttime Restriction.”)

### Does your state or municipal law have any restrictions on cell phone use?

We recommend: Don’t use the cell phone when driving. If you have to take or place a call, pull over out of traffic. Hands-free is not risk-free. ▼



# ADVICE FROM A COP: ENFORCING TEEN DRIVER SAFETY

**A**s a law enforcement officer, one of the most emotionally difficult aspects of my job is handling the aftermath of a serious or fatal crash involving a teen driver. We never get used to making that phone call or knocking on the door to break the news that someone in the family has been injured or killed. Once you've been through it, you'll do everything you can to prevent it from happening again.

For years, we've known some combinations are more likely to lead to that dreaded notification than others. Top of the list includes: carloads of teens on a Friday or Saturday night, combined with distractions from passengers, a higher likelihood of people riding unbuckled, and the real possibility of underage drinking. Each can contribute to a crash in the making. Now we know to look for more than the speeding driver, or the teen driver who's weaving or out of control. In the states with Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) laws, research shows that teen crash rates go down. These statistics have given traffic safety officials new awareness of the special risks teens face – and new tools to help prevent a crash from happening. We know a teen is at higher risk by driving with teen passengers or at night. Whether passengers and night driving are restricted under a teen's provisional license depends on your state's laws. Our job is to watch out for both violations and high-risk situations.

We are committed to providing enforcement initiatives that are designed to prevent teen crashes. Writing traffic tickets is a means to improve public safety and increase the likelihood that more teens in our community get home safely. Our objective is to keep our roads safe – to increase compliance with the law by teens and parents alike, by enforcing the law.

Law enforcement personnel aggressively and consistently enforce vehicle and traffic laws which are critical to maintaining the quality of life in their community. A traffic death can require just as much personnel, time, and related cost to investigate as a

homicide. It may be easier to prevent a car crash than a homicide – the warning signs are more predictable and often more public. But in both cases, a family in the community loses someone.

## YOU HELP US – WE'LL HELP YOU

We see ourselves as active partners in parents' efforts to keep their teen drivers safe. Where a parent's job ends, ours begins. We are your eyes and ears on the road. But we get frustrated when we feel like parents expect us to do their jobs for them.

Before your teen gets on the road, we expect you and your teen to know the law. We hope you've had some serious talks and maybe put some restrictions in writing about the risks the teen faces from both the choices he makes and the risks that come from being a novice teen driver.

But we also know that parents can get frustrated when external pressures have greater influences over their teens than they do. The authors of this Guide asked, "What steps can a parent take to keep a teen from speeding, or drinking and driving? How can a parent enforce the restrictions in a parent-teen driving agreement before the teen leaves the house?" My answers sound a lot like the answers researchers and highway traffic safety professionals give when they are asked the same question.

**1** Be a role model with your actions. How you drive will directly affect your teen's driving habits.

**2** Be a role model with your words. How you talk about law enforcement, how seriously you take safety, directly affects your teen's respect for law and understanding of risk.

**3** Be informed. Be involved. Educate yourself about your state and local laws. Communicate with your teen. Ask him or her questions. Confirm his or her answers.



**4** Inform your teen. Educate your teen about the law, and about risk. The better you prepare your teen to make critical decisions for himself/herself, the better decisions he or she will make when called upon to do so.

**5** Fundamental rules for good parenting are the fundamental rules for managing a safe driving experience for your teen. Set expectations, define consequences, and follow through. All of us perform better when we know what to expect.

It's also smart to know your teen, and the situations that are likely to be temptations for him or her. There

are times law enforcement is alert to a higher likelihood of teen crashes. You, the parent, should think about them, too. A couple of examples:

- It's a weekend, a night before a holiday, prom season, the last week of exams, or the end of the school year. These are all times when teens get together in a car, wanting to celebrate or unwind. This translates to less control behind the wheel, higher-risk activities, and increased crash rates.
- There's a major change in weather. The first snow of the season is clearly a challenge for anyone who has never driven in winter – but so is the first warm day





of spring. That's when the motorcycles, bicycles, and convertibles start to come out. When you add all those distractions to a case of teenage spring fever, a collision can happen.

By paying attention and staying alert to trouble before it happens, you make your job – and ours – a lot more effective.

## **YOUR TEEN'S SAFETY: WE SHARE A RESPONSIBILITY**

Once your teen is on the road, our job is to enforce the law to prevent crashes from happening. We want parents to know what their kids are doing in their cars, because we know parental involvement is the best teen crash prevention.

Officers do have some discretion in their responses to teen drivers. They don't always exercise the most severe option. The men and women who serve your community and patrol your streets are savvy and observant. They watch who goes where, when. Depending on the size of your community, they probably either know the parent, the teen, or at the very least, someone who knows you. They try to find the option they think will most likely avert a crash and prevent a repeat offense, whether that's issuing a warning, making a phone call home, issuing a ticket, or taking stricter actions.

When you hear of cases where parents have gotten a call from a police officer saying, "You need to come and pick up your teen and the vehicle at this intersection," chances are the officer wanted the parent to be present at the site and see firsthand what he or she saw, and why the activity needed to stop. Sometimes it makes a more lasting impression on both parents and teens if they're at the scene together.

Teens know which communities are tough on speeding and traffic violations. That's why we're more visible and vigilant at certain times. For instance, we want teens to start the school year right off knowing that we're watching, and we will enforce the law. We know from experience that with teen driving safety, the old adage is true: An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

In the end, though, there can't ever be enough law enforcement personnel on the road to enforce every

provisional license restriction, 24 hours a day. And that's just the teen driver restrictions in GDL laws, not the ones in your Parent/Teen Agreement. We can't possibly do it all. We will do our job – we will enforce the law. We can and will stop an action that needs to be stopped – but we can't be everywhere all the time. We need the cooperation and partnership of parents, teens, and the community to stop teen crashes before they occur.

Decisions that seem so minor – like buckling a seat belt – can make such a profound difference in the rest of a teen's life. Help your teen understand how important those decisions can be, by talking to him or her about risk and putting rules and consequences in place.

So when your teen walks out the door, don't just say "drive carefully"; insist upon it with your words and actions. Raise the odds of your teen coming home safe.

*The National Safety Council thanks Chief Michael Geraci of the Schenectady, New York Police Department for his contribution to the Family Guide. Chief Geraci is the Chair of the New York State Chiefs of Police Highway Safety Committee and is in his second term on the Highway Safety Committee of the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP). Mike is also the father of four (now adult) drivers, two of whom are also police officers. ▼*



# INSURANCE RATES:

## ANOTHER COST OF CRASHES

**T**he high cost of the first years of a teen's auto insurance is, unfortunately, a necessary and nearly unavoidable expense. In order to operate a motor vehicle on public highways, financial responsibility for the consequences of any collision involving it is required. That financial responsibility is usually covered by an insurance policy. But you can keep this necessary expense from increasing when you follow the advice laid out in this Guide, and a couple of tips we'll discuss in this section.

The amount your family pays for insurance is an estimate of what the insurance company expects it will pay for claims for a family like yours. Your family's rates are based on what the insurance company knows about the claims from all drivers and vehicles like those in your family, such as what you drive, how much you drive, and where you live and drive. For instance, newer, high-performance cars are likely to have more crashes and theft than older "family sedans." Vehicles that are used for commutes to and from work are likely to have more claims than vehicles that are used less often. Claims for both theft and crashes are more frequent in urban areas than in smaller communities and rural areas.

A driver's actual record of crashes and violations will have a major impact on increasing or decreasing her insurance premium. Drivers with the best records pay lower rates and drivers with the worst records pay higher rates.

If you haven't already gotten an estimate for the expense of adding a teen to the family's auto insurance policy, get ready for "sticker shock." When you add a teen driver to your family policy, the rates you pay will be calculated based upon what the insurance company knows about teen drivers in general. Novice teen drivers have more crashes and are the source of more claims. But, like all drivers, as your teen establishes her own driving record, your family's rates will be calculated more on the actual record than data on the general public. Now, being crash-free and violation-free is not just about safety. It is the first, most important thing parents and teens can do to save money on your insurance premiums.

### WHY DO I NEED AUTO INSURANCE?

If you're in a crash, whether or not you were the cause or there was a ticket issued by a police officer, someone involved in the crash could claim damages against you. Insurance protects the driver – and others involved in a crash – from shouldering the expense of a crash directly. With thorough coverage, insurance can pay for damages you sustain to yourself or your car, and for damages others claim against you. In the case of a major crash, insurance can pay hospital and property costs that many individuals couldn't afford on their own. And insurance companies go to bat for their customers. They want to keep insurance costs down, so they work with each other to settle claims and disputes and keep people out of court.

For parents, insuring the teen is not only the law, it's the smart thing to do. As long as the teen lives under the parents' roof, the parents are liable for any claims against that teen anyway. Better to pay for insurance and be protected from the possibility of a huge one-time cost. In some states, the only alternative to auto insurance for a teen driver is for parents to file a bond against any liabilities for which the teen might be held responsible.

Plus, financial institutions require insurance on cars they've made loans against, so if your car is financed, insurance is a must.

### HOW CAN WE KEEP AUTO INSURANCE COSTS DOWN?

Most insurance companies realize that their customers are about to bear a new and unwelcome expense and want to work with you to help keep those costs down. They're interested in keeping you and the members of your family as customers. And they're interested in reducing their exposure to the costs of a crash, which begins when you reduce your exposure to crash risk.



### **HERE ARE SOME POINTS TO CONSIDER TO KEEP YOUR RATES AS LOW AS POSSIBLE:**

What car will the teen drive? This question matters to the insurance company for a number of reasons. Different crash risks are associated with different vehicles, especially for teen drivers. Big, boring station wagons may have better track records when it comes to crashes, injuries, and repair costs than late-model, high-performance vehicles, for instance. If you have a choice of vehicles for the teen to drive, consider the impact it could have on your insurance rates.

Is the teen the sole driver of the car, or is she sharing the family car? Teens who share a car with the family typically spend less time behind the wheel than those who have their own car, and consequently are considered a lower risk. The caution the teen exercises when driving may also be different when it's mom's or dad's car. Insurance companies will charge a higher premium if the vehicle, new or old, is intended for use solely by the teen.

Do the teen's grades qualify him for a "good-student discount"? Many insurance companies offer a discount to families whose teen driver maintains a "B" grade point average. Based on the exposure to risk, insurance companies find that teens with good grades tend to be in fewer crashes. No one knows the exact reason why. It may be that good students are more careful drivers, or that they're just too busy studying to be on the road much. Whatever the reason, it can save you money, if you qualify.

Is your deductible as high as you can afford? The higher your deductible, the lower your premiums. By selecting the maximum you would be willing to pay out-of-pocket every year, your insurance premium will be lower. If you have no crashes, or only minor mishaps, then you will save money in the long run.







And finally, the factor that has the single greatest impact on keeping your teen's auto insurance rates as low as possible:

Is the teen crash-free and violation-free?

Her driving record has a direct impact on your family's insurance costs. Your new driver's actual record of crashes and violations will begin to carry more weight in determining your insurance premium than the information about all teen crashes. Even "unpreventable" crashes (cases where someone else hit the teen's car, through no fault of the teen) may still count as black marks on the teen's driving record. Those crashes are considered "predictive" of future crashes and future claims. Enough "unpreventable" crashes and some insurance adjusters will say, "This teen doesn't know how to drive defensively and get out of trouble. She's a risk, so her rates go up."

### **THE COST OF CRASHES**

Insurance companies have the right to cancel individuals for certain reasons, but they would rather keep you and

all the members of your family as customers. Before a cancellation looms, your insurance company may give you warnings. A poor driving record will eventually increase your insurance premium to the point that you may consider putting the teen on her own policy, or, as some companies suggest, severely restrict the times and places she is allowed to drive. There are "high-risk" policies for the luckless or reckless. It may be better to have the teen on her own high-risk policy, than keep her on the family policy and pay for high-risk insurance for everyone on it. After two to three years, if the motorist has had a clean record, then premiums go back down to a less painful level.

Reducing the teen driver's exposure to risk through gradual introduction to more complex driving tasks with higher crash probability is not only the best way to protect your teen from crashing, it's also sound financial advice. ▼



# Congratulations You've earned it!

## Are We There Yet?

### Have you had enough warnings and advice?

If you've made it this far, you've made a big difference not only in your teen driver's exposure to risk, but you've had a real safety impact on your family and community – and, we hope, instilled good driving habits that will stay with him the rest of his life.

Your teen driver deserves credit for his self-restraint and maturity. We know this hasn't always been easy. It's meant a lot of delayed gratification, and maybe some tough calls with both family and friends. A parent should have confidence in a teen who has stayed with the program. A teen who has been crash-free and violation-free through the process has shown himself able to acknowledge risk, and hold himself accountable for his actions.

Now comes the moment you've all been waiting for – full and independent driving status. Now you know all the meanings of “Graduated.”

### Master of ceremonies, the keys, please!



# SELECTED RESOURCES

## FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

### ■ AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety

607 14th Street, NW, Suite 201  
Washington, DC 20005  
<http://www.aaafoundation.org>

### ■ American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators

**AAMVA's links to jurisdictions:**  
4301 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 400  
Arlington, VA 22203  
[www.aamva.org](http://www.aamva.org)  
[www.aamva.org/membershipleadership/regions](http://www.aamva.org/membershipleadership/regions)

### ■ American Driver & Traffic Safety Education Association

ADTSEA/NSSP  
Highway Safety Center  
Indiana University of Pennsylvania  
R & P Building  
Indiana, PA 15705  
[www.adtsea.iup.edu](http://www.adtsea.iup.edu)

### ■ Centers for Disease Control & Prevention

1600 Clifton Road  
Atlanta, GA 30333  
[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

### ■ Chrysler Group

Auburn Hills, MI 48326-2766  
<http://www.chrysler.com>

### ■ Chrysler's Road Ready Teens

<http://www.roadreadyteens.org>

### ■ General Motors Corporation

300 Renaissance Center  
Detroit, MI 48265-3000  
<http://www.gm.com>

### ■ Insurance Institute for Highway Safety

1005 N. Glebe Road, Suite 800  
Arlington, VA 22201  
[www.iihs.org](http://www.iihs.org)

### ■ Mothers Against Drunk Driving

MADD National Office  
511 E. John Carpenter Frwy., Suite 700  
Irving, TX 75062  
[www.madd.org](http://www.madd.org)

### ■ National Academy of Science (Transportation Research Board)

Keck Center of the National Academies  
Transportation Research Board  
500 Fifth Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20001  
[www.nas.edu](http://www.nas.edu) ([www.trb.org](http://www.trb.org))

### ■ National Conference of State Legislatures

Denver Office:  
7700 East First Place  
Denver, CO 80230  
[www.ncsl.org](http://www.ncsl.org)

### ■ National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, DC 20590  
[www.nhtsa.gov](http://www.nhtsa.gov)

### ■ National Safety Council

1121 Spring Lake Drive  
Itasca, IL 60143-3201  
[www.nsc.org](http://www.nsc.org)  
[www.teendriver.nsc.org](http://www.teendriver.nsc.org)

### ■ National Transportation Safety Board

490 L'Enfant Plaza, SW  
Washington, DC 20594  
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# CHECKLIST

## GETTING YOUR TEEN READY: DRIVING SKILLS CHECKLIST

Use this checklist to structure each practice driving session with your teen. The learning-to-drive process takes practice and time. Some teens will learn quickly, while others need more time

and coaching. As a driving partner, create a tone in which your teen driver can say, "I need help," "I don't understand," or "Can I try that again?"

	Satisfactory	Needs Improvement
<input type="checkbox"/> Pre-driving checks/Adjustments		
<input type="checkbox"/> Anticipating actions of others		
<input type="checkbox"/> Backing		
<input type="checkbox"/> Bad weather/Adverse conditions		
<input type="checkbox"/> Day and night driving		
<input type="checkbox"/> Deer/Animals on roadway		
<input type="checkbox"/> Distractions (in and outside vehicle)		
<input type="checkbox"/> Driving in work zones		
<input type="checkbox"/> Emergency/Maintenance vehicles		
<input type="checkbox"/> False starts		
<input type="checkbox"/> Following distances		
<input type="checkbox"/> Hand adjustment on steering wheel		
<input type="checkbox"/> Intersections		
<input type="checkbox"/> Lane change		
<input type="checkbox"/> Merging		
<input type="checkbox"/> Operation of all vehicle controls, gauges, lights		
<input type="checkbox"/> Parking		
<input type="checkbox"/> Passing		
<input type="checkbox"/> Railroad crossings		
<input type="checkbox"/> Recovery (wheels drop off road)		
<input type="checkbox"/> Safety belts		
<input type="checkbox"/> Scanning		
<input type="checkbox"/> School busses		
<input type="checkbox"/> Sharing the road with trucks		
<input type="checkbox"/> Speed control (change of speed, entering turns, gravel)		
<input type="checkbox"/> Starting		
<input type="checkbox"/> Stopping		
<input type="checkbox"/> Traffic signs and signals		
<input type="checkbox"/> Turning		
<input type="checkbox"/> Using mirrors		
<input type="checkbox"/> Using turn signals		
<input type="checkbox"/> U-turns (if legal)		



**THE CONCEPT AND CONTENT OF THE FAMILY GUIDE WERE BASED ON CONSULTATION WITH A WIDE RANGE OF INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE DEDICATED MUCH OF THEIR CAREERS TO PROMOTING TEEN DRIVER SAFETY, AND MOST OF THEM ARE OR WERE PARENTS OF TEEN DRIVERS THEMSELVES. THE FAMILY GUIDE IS RICH WITH THEIR PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND THEIR PERSONAL EXPERIENCE. THEIR ORGANIZATIONAL OR PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATION IS INCLUDED ONLY FOR PURPOSES OF IDENTIFICATION, AND DOES NOT REPRESENT AN ENDORSEMENT OR AUTHORIZATION BY THAT ORGANIZATION OR GROUP.**

Patricia F. Waller PhD

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*Whose life's work made this possible. 1932-2003.*

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**What percent of teen deaths are due to car crashes?**

- ☐ 10%
- ☐ 20%
- ☐ 33%
- ☐ 44%

*Answer is on page 4*

**What percent of teen driver fatal crashes occur after nightfall?**

- ☐ 40%
- ☐ 30%
- ☐ 25%
- ☐ 20%

*Answer is on page 33*

**How many 16-year-olds get in a car crash?**

- ☐ 1 out of 50 16-year-olds get in a crash
- ☐ 1 out of 20
- ☐ 1 out of 10
- ☐ 1 out of 5

*Answer is on page 9*

**Seat belts reduce your chance of fatal injuries by what percent?**

- ☐ 25%
- ☐ 37%
- ☐ 45%
- ☐ 50%

*Answer is on page 39*

**A teen's risk of crashing is highest when?**

- ☐ During the first 2 months
- ☐ During the first 6 months
- ☐ During the first 1,000 miles
- ☐ All of the above

*Answer is on page 11*

**What percent of teen drivers in fatal crashes were drinking?**

- ☐ 16%
- ☐ 21%
- ☐ 31%
- ☐ 71%

*Answer is on page 42*

**Passengers increase a 17-year-old's likelihood of dying in a motor vehicle crash by how much?**

- ☐ 48% more likely with 1 passenger
- ☐ 258% more likely with 2 passengers
- ☐ 307% more likely with 3 passengers
- ☐ All of the above

*Answer is on page 29*

**How many young drivers admit to texting behind the wheel?**

- ☐ 15%
- ☐ 20%
- ☐ 25%
- ☐ 40%

*Answer is on page 44*

[teendriver.nsc.org](http://teendriver.nsc.org)

